

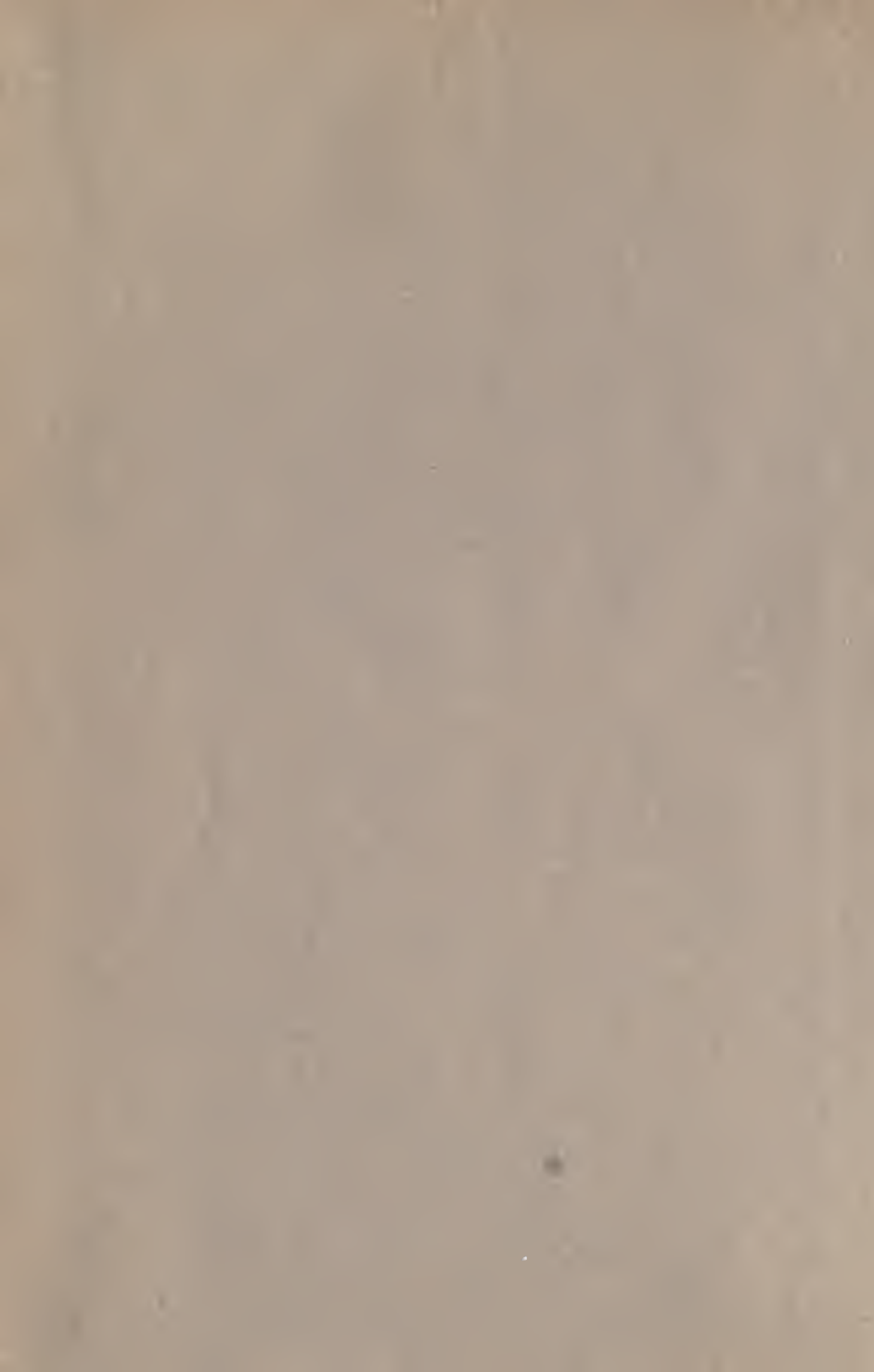




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THE
LIFE AND TIMES
(1660-1750)
OF THE
SERVANT OF GOD
ABBOT MECHITAR.

FOUNDER OF THE ARMENIAN MECHITARISTS

of VENICE (SAN LAZZARO).

(With 55 illustrations and 50 documents)

HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ORIENTAL QUESTIONS.

Written in Italian by FATHER MINAS NURIKHAN.

Translated by Rev. John Mc Quillan.

1915

St. Lazarus' Island, Venice.

Errata

Corrige

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Rome, 29th December, 1915.

Very Rev. Father,

It is with feelings of the greatest pleasure that I come to hear that an English translation of your "Life of Abbot Mechitar" is being proceeded with, As Cardinal Ponens I am most happy to think that the numbers of the admirers of the Servant of God are continually increasing, and I nourish the fond hope that the prayers of the good may hasten the day when the Lord will permit us venerate on our altars this purest glory of the Armenian Church, this genial Founder of the commendable Congregation of Mechitarists.

I most willingly take this occasion to renew my congratulations to you, Very Rev. Father, on your work, which I have read with an ever-increasing affection and interest, for I have found in it some really beautiful and admirable things. Not least amongst these was your filial piety, your loving diligence in collecting and presenting before the great Christian public, whatsoever might tend to making more endearing the already grand figure of the Servant of God.

Our Lord will recompense you for it! Thanking you anew, I have the pleasure of being, Very Rev. Father,

*Your most humble servant,
J. Cardinal Granito di Belmonte,
Bishop of Albano.*

*Very Rev. Father,
Minas Nurikhan,
Mechitarist of Venice*

Rome.

1098774



TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD.

It is with feelings of the greatest pleasure that I present this Oriental work before the English-speaking public.

For eight years now I have been conversing intimately with Orientals here in the centre of Christendom, studying their character, attending and serving their sublime liturgies, reading their entrancing history and witnessing with great regret that their religious position was misunderstood and that they themselves were scoffed at and their very name despised. I longed for the time when I could make them better known to Western Christendom, and was delighted when the original author of this work invited me to translate it into English.

The subject of this biography is a personage quite unknown to the English-speaking world—I might say, to the entire West, if we except the province of Venice, yet he was undoubtedly a landmark in Ecclesiastical History. He was a saintly man, a person gifted with an uncommon Christian fortitude and heroism which God was pleased to confirm by many miracles, and one whom we hope soon to see crowned with the glory of the altar. His was a master mind capable of original thought and framed for taking the lead in enterprising works.

He founded a religious congregation which, as the reader will see, has formed a link between East

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and West and has, by its extraordinary literary activity, been a powerful means of making one known to the other.

This English translation is substantially the same as the original Italian, but few changes having been made, with the author's consent, to suit English readers. With the same end in view a general notion of Armenians and their traditions has been added to the work in the form of Appendices.

Reading this book for the first time I felt like *Geoffrey Austin* in the late Canon Sheehan's "Triumph of Failure", who said, "I found that for years my ideas of the ancient Greeks, whom I loved so much, were quite undefined and hazy because I had such nebulous notions of the topography of that wonderful country". So I drew a map of the country traversed by the Servant of God and another of the Venetian lagoon and had them inserted here to guide the studious reader of the Abbot's active life.

There is to be found a new atmosphere in the countries and peoples mentioned herein, and a glimpse is given us by a master hand of life in the Levant. Hundreds of letters of congratulations have poured in to the author from the highest in the land. Cardinals, Bishops and Theologians have attested to the sound doctrinal treatment of the deep theological questions here touched on; members of both houses of the Italian Parliament have praised the satisfactory description of the political state of the period discussed, and literary men of all colours have vied with one another in praising the grandeur of style and purity of diction of this beautiful volume. I finally persuaded the venerable old priest, who was the recipient of these encomia, to allow some of them be prefixed to the body of the work as examples.

Let me add a few words of my own in praise of this exceptionally fine volume. Naturally no one has had the occasion of examining it so closely as I, since I had to take every word in every page, find out its true meaning and proper setting; and so it was that I entered thoroughly into the author's mind. The book has been well represented by many critics as a picture. The historical background, so faithfully and fully depicted, sets off well the subject of the work, whose figure is clearly delineated and enthusiastically lauded by one of his loving sons. As the story preceeds, a few more touches of the brush opportunely indicate the momentous events in our hero's life and from the first page to the last there breathes through it all a delicacy of language and sentiment, a semi-archaic picturesqueness of personages and events which really enchants one. It proved a pleasant work during the long summer vacation down here in the sunny south.

The translation of the original suffers a little, perhaps, from the fact that somewhat of the simplicity of oriental diction has intentionally been retained, particularly in the many documents to be found in the course of the work. The number of these letters has been somewhat curtailed in the translation, but many have been inserted to serve as documentary evidence of facts — political and religious — which were of primary historical importance, and also as specimens of oriental style and customs. They form, too, conclusive evidence of Abbot Mechitar's orthodoxy and have been of incalculable benefit in promoting the cause of his beatification.

In the course of this work I may have occasion, in the cause of truth, to write against the Catholic Encyclopaedia or Catholic writers (especially Dr. Ad-

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rian Fortescue). It is through no illwill towards these that I thus speak out boldly, but merely because, while recognizing their merits, I am afraid lest others be led into error in Oriental questions while perusing their works, as I have been in the past.

Finally I must observe that the authoritative tone of this book on Oriental affairs is to be ascribed to the original author, Dr. Nurikhan, and not to me, though I may add that years of study and familiar intercourse with Orientals and their ways have put me in a position to corroborate fully whatever views have been here expressed.

May these pages, which we honestly believe will fill a vacancy in English literature on Armenians—especially from the Catholic standpoint—make these Orientals better understood, known and loved, the labours of the Mechitarist Fathers better appreciated and the work of the “Reunion of the Churches” more loyally seconded.

Before finishing, let me give due thanks and honour to Maxwell Ogilvie, Esq. D. Ph., B. A. Oxon., who corrected the manuscript and made valuable suggestions.

“And do you, saintly Mechitar, from that bright throne on high, where we lovingly believe thee to be, receive this act of homage from me, the last of thy admirers, and hear my prayer that the sons whom thou didst beget in Christ may continue thy grand work here below and finally succeed in bringing back thy country to the one fold of the one true shepherd”.

Scots College.

Rome.

17th January 1916.

Rev. John Mc Quillan.

Ph. D., B. J. C., S. T. L.

Feast of St. Anthony the Abbot.

The following are a few of the many testimonies sent to the author to congratulate him on his grand work.

From the "*Osservatore Romano*" 19th May 1914.

AUDIENCE OF THE POPE.

The Holy Father received to-day in private audience the Very Rev. Dr. Minas Nurikhan of the Mechitarists of Venice, who presented him with a copy of the new "Life" of the Abbot Peter Mechitar of Sebaste, Founder of the Order of the Mechitarist Fathers for the missions in Armenia.

The work, *which is a notable contribution to the history of Catholicism in Armenia*, is dedicated to the Sovereign Pontiff.

The Holy Father, who, whilst Patriarch of Venice, completed the ordinary Processes for the Introduction of the Cause of Beatification of the same Servant of God, graciously accepted the token of filial homage, and, congratulating Father Minas, Postulator of the Cause, on the work he had compiled, bestowed on him the Apostolic Blessing.

Palace of Her Majesty
The Queen-Mother.
Rome, 27th April, 1914.

Reverend Father,

I have had the pleasant duty of presenting to Her Majesty the Queen-Mother the copy of the work, "La Vita del Servo di Dio Abate Mechitar, e suoi tempi", which Your Reverence offered to Her with your devout homage.

I am now happy to inform you that the valuable offering was graciously welcomed by the august Lady, who will read with particular interest the life, so learnedly written by you, of the Founder of that Mechitarian Community of St. Lazarus towards which she has ever shown a singular and benevolent sympathy. Meanwhile Her Majesty wishes me to return you heartfelt thanks for this gentle act of homage, and I, while fulfilling the royal command, hasten to thank you personally for the copy of the same noteworthy publication, so courteously presented to me.

Receive, Reverend Father, the assurance of my profound esteem.

Reverend
F. Minas Nuri Khan,
Mechitarist of Venicé,
Rome

For Her Majesty's Lady
of Honour,
The Knight of Honour,
Guiccioli.

Pisa, 11/2/1915

Rev. Father,

For some time now I owe you my thanks for the gift of the precious "Life of Abbot Mechitar", and whilst I beg your pardon for my delay, which though painful was not culpable, I ask you in the fulfilment of my duty to accept my congratulations on the work, along with my gratitude for the gift. I admired the research and the method with which the book was compiled, but still more did I admire the affection which breathes through the work for the Servant of God and his religious family, and as a bishop, how pleased I was to witness this devotion which reveals a heart wholly devoted to God and His Church!

We pray that this affection will become ever more felt among priests so that they may find the way of true zeal and virtue in attachment to the Church and her discipline.

Pardon me, Rev. Father, and believe me

Yours most affectionately
Cardinal Maffi, Archbishop of Pisa.

Ferrara, 16th September, 1915.

Very Rev. Father,

A few months ago I received the biography of the Servant of God, Abbot Mechitar, presented to me by Your Paternity. Before answering this act of exquisite kindness I wished to read the whole book, for I knew little of the Abbot's life. Now that I know it sufficiently I must say that the work pleased me very much. I wonder why Abbot Mechitar has not yet been given the honour of the altars

and I exhort Your Paternity to strive more and more to bring this about. Though the Servant of God will thus receive but accidental glory, his heroic virtues having already obtained for him substantial glory in the bosom of God, nevertheless this great Mechitarist Congregation will be duly honoured thereby and Venice will have occasion to rejoice.

I thank you most heartily for the gift you have sent me and while praying you to present my compliments to his Excellency, Mgr Ghiurekian¹, I offer you my profound respect and am proud to profess myself the most devoted servant

of Your Very Rev. Paternity,
† Julius Cardinal Boschi,
Archbishop of Ferrara.

Extract from the “Civiltà Cattolica”.

“.... The cause of the Servant of God, interrupted by political changes in Venice, was resumed in 1901 under the auspices of the Patriarch Card. Sarto, who shortly afterwards was elevated to the Chair of St. Peter. It is to be hoped that the day is near when this grand son of the Armenian Church, who has hitherto remained too much in the shade, will be glorified on earth too. For this purpose has been written this new biography, compiled with great love and diligence by the illustrious Father Minas, the Postulator of the Cause. The sources to which he had access are the writings of the Servant of God and especially the *Letters* which are kept in four huge manuscript volumes; then, in particular,

1. Abbot-General of the Mechitarist Congregation at Venice.

there was the "Life" compiled by the Abbot's co-operator and most intimate counsellor, the saintly Father Matthew of Eudocia.

Extract from the "Gazzetta di Mondovì" 20th May, 1914.

"..... While reading this splendid volume I thought of the divine beauty of the Catholic Church which ever drew to itself in every age and in all places the men of the greatest genius and, still more, of virtue.

Father Mechitar will be for all times a splendid gem of the Catholic Church. He was born in Armenia (Turkey in Asia) in the year 1676, the son of a race of martyrs, of a nation which shares with the Irish and the Poles the sad glory of an immolation which has lasted for centuries, to the everlasting shame of false politics fomented by vile hate. Christian states and princes, occupied in maintaining their own equilibrium, have allowed Christian blood to run, not in rivers but in seas, over there amongst those poor Armenians, our brothers in the faith. Mechitar, holy and learned, was a man of God and wholly devoted to the interest of his brethren, his Church and Armenia his native-land, which in his day was fighting in a death-struggle with two fierce enemies — the oppressive scimitar of the Turk and the schism and heresy of unworthy compatriots. Abbot Mechitar loved his country and established an Order which saved Armenia's language, liturgy and rites along with the grand historical and literary glories of her past. He loved his Church, too, and wished his Order to be composed of missionaries who should propagate the faith amongst his countrymen.

The author of this work, prefacing the book with a summary account of the sources from which he compiled these pages, presents Abbot Mechitar

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to us, allowing us, as it were, assist at his religious formation and at his pilgrimages, like a knight-errant, amid the continual snares laid for him by schism and heresy. He analyses the first conception of the idea, then its development and fulfilment, of realizing one of the boldest of holy projects in the Christian Orient in the last centuries — the foundation of a religious order composed of Armenians for Armenians, a work worthy of the mind and heart of our saintly Abbot. While reading this erudite composition of Doctor Nurikhan, we in the West are enlightened by a competent authority on many dogmatic and disciplinary questions mooted in times past between Catholic Rome and that East which unworthy patriarchs so often wished to drag out of the true Church. We read here of interesting episodes, intermingled with the history of the holy Abbot, which bring us to love those distant brethren, tried so much in their love for Rome and yet unknown to us.

How much did not our hero suffer and toil in the accomplishment of his great mission, after journeying hither and thither in the Levant, to Constantinople, to Modon in the Morea and finally to Venice, to the island of St. Lazarus, where he halted. Here his cherished work prospered and helped both politically and spiritually his Armenian compatriots to whom he continually sent missionaries. His work prospers even to-day to the advantage of the learned of the entire world, by means of the rich library and famous printing-press of the monastery, long become a beacon of intellectual light and a point of contact between East and West. A perfect picture of Mechitar's times is this erudite monograph of our author and he gives us valuable information on the varying fate of the Venetian dom-

inion in the East, as in the Turco-Venetian War of 1711, the taking of Modon and the loss of the Morea. He throws a flood of light on the relations which in the course of centuries existed between Armenians and our Europe which had numerous and flourishing colonies of them. The Dominicans had a successful religious province in Armenia, an Armenian king became a Franciscan, the last king of the nation fled for refuge to Paris, where he died, the famous St. Expeditus is an Armenian martyr, and so forth. To these few Armeno-European relations I should like to add a further one, viz, that at Ancona is venerated a St. Liberius who, according to the opinion of the most competent and erudite authorities, is no other than an Armenian religious of St. Francis.

Mechitar was a great admirer of our Cardinal Bona, whose writings, especially his ascetical treatises "Principles of Christian Life" and "Will", he studied deeply.

We do not wonder at the historical erudition, the theological exactitude and the abundant literary information of this learned Armenian priest, but we do marvel at the purity and elegance of language and style of one coming from a country so distant from ours, who has used the language of Dante so well as to be a model for many of our own countrymen. We fondly hope that this grand work which has served to let us know, esteem and love these companions in the faith and principally the grand figure of Mechitar, will serve also to bring about such a fraternizing of peoples as will manifest itself not in barren admiration but in help with prayers and money.

Rivista Benedettina 30th June 1914.

The Very Rev. Don Placid Lugano, director of the *Rivista Benedettina*, Consultor of the Sacred Congregations of Religious and of Studies, speaking of the "Life of Abbot Mechitar", written by Father Minas Nurikhan gives a resumé of the work and then concludes as follows:

"The biography composed by the illustrious Father Minas delineates and, as it were chisels out the living figure of Abbot Mechitar who arises busies himself with the civil and religious amelioration of his country, suffers in the defence of himself and others, and with indefatigable zeal and subtlety of learning clears up various disciplinary points which were for ever occasions of heated discussion and the source of deplorable divisions. The various questions are always handled in the light of contemporary documents and with full knowledge of the customs and manners of the Armenia of those days. Hence the reader comes gradually to take greater interest in this clear and simple narration, which makes him live in a world vastly different from our own.

Numerous engravings delight the eye and double the merit of the book which is directed to make known, even in Italy, the work of a man, holy in life, who had, and yet has, not a few ties which bind him to Italy".

THE
SERVANT OF GOD
ABBOT MECHITAR
FOUNDER OF THE **MECHITARIST FATHERS**



THE
LIFE AND TIMES
OF THE
SERVANT OF GOD
ABBOT MECHITAR.

FOUNDER OF THE MECHITARIST FATHERS

(With 55 illustrations and 50 documents)

BY

FATHER MINAS NURIKHAN

MECHITARIST OF VENICE.

Translated from the Italian

BY

JOHN Mc QUILLAN



1915

St. Lazarus' Island, Venice.

In obedience to the decrees of Urban VIII, the author protests that to what is said in this life of the Servant of God. Abbot Mechitar, he does not intend to give other than purely human authority, except in what has been approved by the Apostolic See.

IMPRIMATUR

Fr. Albertus Lepidi, O. P. S. P. A. Magister

IMPRIMATUR

Franciscus Faberj Vicariatus Urbis Adsector

TO POPE PIUS X

STAR, LEADER AND PRECEPTOR
OF THE WHOLE WORLD,
WHO PIOUSLY DESIRED
BOTH IN HIS VENETIAN PATRIARCHATE
AND ON THE PAPAL THRONE
TO SEE ON THE ALTARS
ABBOT MECHITAR OF SEBASTE,
WHO, AN EXILE FROM ARMENIA,
FOUND A HOME IN VENICE,
THE LATTER'S MOST HUMBLE SONS
GRATEFULLY OFFER, DEDICATE
AND CONSECRATE
THIS BOOK.



The Servant of God, Abbot Mechitar.



INTRODUCTION.



‘Once in spring-time, as St. Francis was going with Brother Leo from Perugia to St. Mary of the Angelos and the intense cold was giving them great pain, he called Brother Leo who was walking on ahead, and said to him, “Brother Leo, although the Friars Minor give in every land a grand example of holiness of life and great edification, nevertheless *write down and note diligently* that there is no perfect happiness here below”¹. Brother Leo, ‘God’s little sheep’ as St. Francis used to call him, listened and *noted down diligently* the long discourse on perfect happiness and many other subjects, whence we have those wonderful narratives which have been the seed of holy flowers and fruits.

It was through an interior divine inspiration that St. Francis, that perfection of humility, commanded Brother Leo to *write down diligently and ingenuously* his own instructions and other parts of the spiritual life, that they might edify and instruct his future sons and bring glory to the Most High. St. Francis, the champion of humility, in order to communicate his interior emotions and inspirations, had chosen, another humble brother, Brother Leo, ‘the little sheep’, who was the secretary of his heart

1. *Little Flowers of St. Francis*. Chap VII.

and his mind, his confessor, the most intimate of his companions and the only person who in the last years of the Seraph's life, when the latter was often rapt in ecstasy, could come near to him while he was praying and say to him or receive from him a word.

In fact we find that it was not without a special dispensation of Divine Providence, that many of the founders of religious or monastic orders had as recorder of their actions, some faithful follower, or some disciple who lived in intimate relations with the founder or his first companions. Thus, to pass by many others, the life of the Patriarch St. Benedict was written by St. Gregory the Great, who had conversed on terms of the strictest intimacy with the founder's four holy disciples, and had come to learn of many things handed down by the great Father of the monks of the west. The Life of St. Dominic was composed by a spiritual daughter of his, Blessed Cecily Cesarini, who was the first Mother of the Dominicanesses at San Sisto in Rome, and the eye-witness of such shining virtues. So also, the figure of St. Catherine of Siena, the glory of the Sisters of Penance, appears, resplendent with light, in the pages of the narrative composed by her confessor, Blessed Raymond delle Vigne, of Capua. Similarly St. Ignatius of Loyola confided the story of his life, his inspirations and heavenly visions to Fathers Lainez, Louis Gonzalez, Ribadeneira and others, who in turn wove the history of his wonderful career. Indeed, it was to Father Lainez that he first recounted the apparition of Jesus with His cross, on his journey from Venice to Rome, whence he desired that his congregation should be named 'the Society of Jesus'¹.

1. *Life of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Founder of the Society of Jesus*, by Father Peter Ribadeneira, bk II. chap XI.

It was not the idea of vainglory that urged these great Saints to dictate pious counsels, to reveal their celestial visions or to commit to writing some part of their spiritual or even human life. Rather was it a sentiment of humility that animated them to glorify God in all things, attributing to Him all the merits of their life, for the better instruction of their disciples.

The Servant of God, Abbot Mechitar, the Founder of the Mechitarian Congregation, was unwilling, while alive, that anyone should draw his picture or write his biography. Nevertheless many circumstances of his life he confided to, or at any rate they in some way come to the knowledge of, his confessor and secretary, Father Matthew, native of Eudocia, and almost his fellow-citizen, belonging, as he did, to the same province. From Father Matthew, who was a holy monk, a model of humility, his confidant and spiritual counsellor, - another Brother Leo - the Abbot Mechitar had not hidden all that concerned his great work and its first beginnings; and on the death of his master, the disciple, now free from all ties, wrote the life of the servant of God, which is at the same time the history of the propagation of Catholicism in Armenia and in countries inhabited by Armenians.

SOURCES OF THE HISTORY OF THE LIFE

OF THE SERVANT OF GOD

ABBOT MECHITAR.

I

The writings of Abbot Mechitar. — His Praises to the B. V. M. and to divers Saints. — His Letters. — Correspondence received. — The prologues and epilogues of his works. — His *will*.

Before speaking of the biography written by Father Matthew, I must note that a part, and that the most important, of the spiritual life of Abbot Mechitar is to be found in his numerous writings, partly published, partly yet unedited.

Among the writings that reflect his interior life, first place must be given to his *Sacred Chants* and the numberless *Praises* to the Virgin Mother, wherein he was wont to pour all the pain of his moral sufferings, like a son speaking to a loving mother with all the simplicity of his intense and simple-hearted devotion. His feelings, though sometimes not expressed in the classic versification of the Armenian language, jet forth, nevertheless, like copious springs of limpid water from a strong rock such as was the soul of the Servant of God and his faith in the powerful intercession of the Mother of our Most Holy Redeemer¹.

1. These hymns were printed for the first time in Venice, in the year 1727; later on in 1732 and 1771 in the printing office of Anthony Bartoli, *with the permission of superiors*, (i. e. of the ecclesiastical authorities).

After these poems, which are the most authentic writings of the Abbot, come his letters which contain a lasting testimony to his emotions and a proof of his extraordinary capacity for work. Since his youth he had acquired the habit of writing, during his pilgrimages to convents and hermitages, to his family and his revered teachers of whose holy lives we shall presently hear. But no letter of those days has come down to us, either because he was not accustomed to keep a copy of them, or because all his writings were irretrievably lost in the passage of the river Karassù, near Aleppo, where barely, and at most miraculously, did he succeed in saving his own life. Hence it is that we have no letters from Constantinople and but a few from Modon.

The first letter worthy of mention bears the date, 15 th July, 1705, and is addressed to His Holiness, Pope Clement XI, accompanied by the Constitutions of his community, which he sent by means of two of his Fathers. In this Letter he clearly delineates the history of the foundation of his community, his plans for the propagation of the catholic faith in his native land and the reasons why he removed from Constantinople to Modon in the Peloponnesus.

The real series of Mechitar's letters begins only in 1710 and forms four large manuscript volumes. These letters are the most genuine and the most outspoken witnesses to his apostolic life, active and yet contemplative, and to his mind in the highest degree commanding and directive. But to the completion of his biography no slight contribution is afforded by the innumerable letters which came to him from all parts inhabited by Armenians, and from the highest ecclesiastical authorities: from the Cardinal-Protector of Propaganda to the simple parish-priest in Armenia, from the Patriarch of the Chaldeans and the Patriarch of the Armenian Catholics, down to the cleric or school-master of the little Armenian village. This correspondence will give us a proper appreciation of the whole course of his life, because the incessant relations between Abbot

Mechitar and the Catholic Armenian ecclesiastical authorities who had recourse to him, will show us in what esteem he was held in matters of doctrine, liturgy and other departments of knowledge. Add to this that he sent missionaries not only throughout the whole of Asia Minor but wherever there were Armenians, and even to Hungary, Belgrade, Galicia and other neighbouring districts. So it comes about that we have to hand a vast and important correspondence containing many reports of missionaries, all of which form inestimable treasures for the history of Armenian Catholicism.

Abbot Mechitar came to the world at an epoch which may well be considered the most disastrous for the faith, the civil progress and the literature of his country. He proposed to himself to be of some use to it, first in the truths of faith and then in secular learning. Without ever having attended colleges or universities, he astounded the world with his erudition. The most learned of his time called him '*A Sun illuminating the nation*'. This expression was used amongst others by Dr. Khatchiatur, a very learned ex-alumnus of the Propaganda College, Rome, who represented for a long time the Holy See among the Armenians and was the bearer of a letter from the Sovereign Pontiff to the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, the spiritual head of the whole nation. Another student of Propaganda, Don Bartholomew Vahrad, missionary-apostolic and rector of the Armenian Church at Leghorn, calls Abbot Mechitar the *Second Illuminator* of the Armenian people, (St. Gregory being the *First*) and appeals to, as witnesses of his *illuminating* sermons and missions, the cities of Erzerum, Sebaste, Tocat, Angora, Melitene, Anteb, Diarbekir, Aleppo, Brussa, Amassa, Adrianople, Constantinople, Merdin, Adana, Cesarea, Trebizond, Mar-sivan and many others. Struck with wonder at such virtue and learning in expounding and defending the holy truths, the Archbishop of Corinth, Angelus Maria Carlini, of the Dominican Order, wrote in 1715 that Mechitar was 'the most resolute champion of the Catholic faith against the degeneracy of heretics'.

Missionaries of different religious orders, Discalced Carmelites, Dominicans, Friars Minor, Capuchins, superiors of the Society of Jesus showed their unbounded admiration for his learning and the acquaintance with the Fathers of the Church which he displayed in his struggles against heretics and schismatics. The Venetian Nobles Anthony Nani, Angelus Emo, Mark Loredan, Daniel Dolfin Quarto, Alvis Mocenigo Terzo, Provisioners-General or Marine Captains of the 'Dominating' and Most Serene Venetian Republic, during their stay in the *Peloponnesian Kingdom* where the Servant of God had in the beginning founded his institute, use the warmest words in praise of Mechitar's virtues, zeal, learning and exemplary life. The Governor of Gherla in Transylvania, Baron Birov, with his twelve counsellors and parish-priest, the Bishop of Claudopolis, Baron Montonffi, the parish-priest of Giurgevo, Elisabethopol and other Armenian localities in Austria-Hungary, send continuous and enthusiastic appeals to the Abbot to send his disciples to preach to them and instruct their children. Such appeals are numerous: from Belgrade, Petrovardino and other cities bordering on Turkey, even from the Crimea and the whole of Asia Minor.

But how can one record all those expressions of enthusiastic admiration which fill every page of the correspondence already printed under the title '*Documents*'? There anyone can see for himself the great esteem in which Mechitar's name and works were held by his contemporaries chief among whom stands, to the honourable boast of the Mechitarian Congregation, the greatest jurist among the Popes, Benedict XIV and the great orientalist Assemani, who calls Mechitar, 'a man famed for virtue and knowledge and a very great friend of mine'. About all this, however, we shall speak in due time.

Abbot Mechitar, in conformity with his unwearying application and phenomenal activity, published a most correct edition of the Holy Bible¹,

1. The oldest printed edition of the Bible in Arme-

wrote on matters theological, moral and liturgical, composed prayer-books, catechisms, ascetical treatises, and biblical commentaries, and at the same time edited immense tomes of linguistic and biographical dictionaries and books on mathematics and astronomy, and in all these works, too, we find some data which help to clear up some points in his biography.

But besides such writings which furnish us with but secondary and indirect matter we have various other ones which speak to us directly of his monastic life and his government of his monasteries.

Among these the following are worthy of particular mention:

1 *The Constitution* which he compiled and sent from Modon to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda for approbation, the original of which is preserved in the Archives of Propaganda.

2. *The Deliberations of the General Chapter*. A small work which bears this title.

3. *Counsels to missionaries*. Written probably in the year 1719.

4. *Counsels for the election of the future Abbot*.

5. *The Report of the Armenian monks* to the S. C. de Propaganda Fide, written in 1718.

6. *The Defence of Father James of Erzerum*.

7. His *Will or Preparation for Death*, which is a complete translation of the sublime work of Cardinal Bona, with small addition or changes with reference to himself. At the end there is Mechitar's profession of faith and an act of absolute

nian is that of Osgan the *Vardapiet* (1663-69). It was printed in Amsterdam, Holland, by the care of the Patriarch of Etchmiadzin. Osgan, who was a member of the community at Etchmiadzin, was sent by the Catholicos to Rome and Leghorn for this edition of the Bible. But he only managed to get it printed in Amsterdam where there was a printing-press for the Armenian language, there being there a colony of rich Armenian merchants.

obedience and devotion to the Holy See in this life and after death in the form of a *will*. Hence this work is also called the *Will of the Abbot Mechitar*, and it was consigned by him on his death-bed to Father Matthew, his secretary. The original of this work, in the handwriting of the Servant of God, we could not lay our hands on. Still, there is a tradition since the very origin of the Mechitarian Congregation that such a work belonged to the Abbot Mechitar and its authenticity was confirmed at Venice in the first Process of the fourth Abbot General, Archbishop Soukias Somalian, and by the illustrious archivist of the time, Father Gabriel Aivazovski. The translation of Cardinal Bona's work has been later on touched up in some parts in the grammatical and classical style of the Armenian language.

These are the primary and principal sources for the spiritual, moral and intellectual life of our hero and to these the historian must with great discernment have recourse. But in his labours and fatigues he is safely guided by the *Life* compiled, as we have already noticed, by the holy and learned monk, Matthew of Eudocia. Some biographical account of him will render the work dedicated by disciple to master, better known and appreciated.

II

Biographical notes on Father Matthew. — His writings. — *The Life of Abbot Mechitar*. — *The Annals* of the Congregation.

Father Matthew, of the family Karacashian, was born in Eudocia, (called also Tocat) in Asia Minor, of pious parents, in the year 1688. At his baptism he was called Jacob. His parents who wished to see him one day a fellow-labourer in the work of Mechitar, then a Doctor of Theology, handed him over, while yet a child, to the direction of a zealous priest. The young boy, who had a leaning towards the

monastic life, gave up even at that tender age all kinds of pleasures and took to frequenting the church and the reading of the Psalms and the *Imitation of Christ* from a copy given by his mother to her beloved son.

However Jacob's wish to enter Mechitar's community was not immediately realised on account of the persecutions (about which more anon) which obliged the servant of God, who had betaken himself to the capital of Turkey, to leave Constantinople and take refuge in the Morea. Mechitar's enemies having spread about in the East the news that the community was dispersed, young Jacob, not finding anything better to do, and wishing to preserve celibacy, determined to go to the Propaganda College, Rome, with the intention of being ordained priest in the Armenian rite and consecrating himself to the work of evangelizing his own nation.

But the boat which was bringing him to Rome stopped for some days at the island of Zante and there he met a lay-brother of Mechitar's, come from Modon, from whom he learned that the community was still in existence. He then determined to go to Modon and fulfil the vow of his childhood. He immediately entered the novitiate, was professed in the year 1708, and, on leaving the world, left aside also, as is the custom, his birth-name and took the name of Matthew. Thereupon he followed a course of studies in philosophy and theology, was ordained priest in the year 1714, and received the degree of doctor from the Abbot Mechitar in 1724 at Venice, whither the community had been transferred.

Father Matthew, while still young, gave himself up xardently to theological studies and distinguished himself also in the contemplative life. According to the testimony of his contemporaries, he was, after the Abbot, the most learned in the community. On that account he was appointed the Abbot's secretary and counsellor. At the same time he received an appointment to teach philosophy and theology, and in this office he continued until he was very far advanced in years. But one of his crowning intel-



Father Matthew from Eudocia

lectual merits was that of having brought back the Armenian tongue to classical form from the state of decadence into which it had fallen.

The image of an ideal monk, blindly obedient, humble, meek, so given to contemplation that he was often rapt in ecstasy, his spirit had great affinity to that of Abbot Mechitar. There was therefore to be found in him a greater fitness for thoroughly understanding his master's soul and writing his life. As a matter of fact, tradition says that even his features resembled Mechitar's, and so in a painting which the famous artist Maggiotto of the Venetian school (1760-1770) executed to the orders of Mechitar's successor, representing the founder on his knees before the Madonna, with the two pious maidens at his side who were the teachers of his infancy, Father Matthew was chosen as a model. He submitted obediently and so we have a picture of him which we represent here.

Father Matthew always lived on St. Lazarus' island, Venice, and died in the odour of sanctity at the age of eighty-five, revered by all, mourned for by old and young alike. The Abbot Stephen Melconian, Mechitar's successor, says that he found in Father Matthew an enlightened counsellor and a father venerated and listened to by all the younger brethren. By reason of his exceptional piety and the reputation for sanctity in which he was held by his brethren and the clergy of Venice, it seemed fitting to bury him in a special tomb in the church of St. Lazarus, at the left-hand side, before the *altar of the Crucifix*.

The tombstone bears the following epitaph in Armenian verse: —

*Resting-place of Father Matthew,
Native of Eulocia, Doctor of Theology,
Cooperator and disciple,
Of the great Abbot Mechitar.
In the contemplative life and in learning
A teacher, profound and inspired;*

*The champion of a virtuous life,
A model to posterity.
Wherefore he rests apart from others
In this special tomb.
He died at the age of eighty-five
And his memory is in benediction.*

The year of the Lord, 1772, 6th Nov¹.

This, then, is the man who lived side by side with Mechitar, was his intimate counsellor and collaborator, and who afterwards wrote his life, that present and futures generations might remember the sublime virtues of his master, his physical and moral sufferings bravely borne, his love of our Blessed Lady, his great resignation, his unbounded charity towards all, particularly towards those who declared themselves his enemies, and his genuine humility preserved in the midst of bewildering success at Constantinople, Modon, Venice and Rome. At the same time Father Matthew describes the holy, exemplary life of the two maidensisters above-mentioned and the austere, contemplative life of the two anchorites, Mechitar's fellow-citizens, about whom we shall hear more in detail. His narrative descends to most minute particulars, but especially dwells on Mechitar's contemplative life, his insatiable thirst for perfection in holiness and for the enlightenment of his coun-

1. This tombstone was transferred to the adjacent sacristy at the laying of the new pavement in red and white polished marble, but the body remained in its place. On All Souls' day a lighted candle is placed over it. Archbishop Soukias Somalian the fourth Abbot-General of the Congregation, in his deposition at the first Process for the beatification of Abbot Mechitar, says that Father Matthew was in the highest reputation for sanctity and so was buried in a tomb specially destined for him. He was the confessor, secretary and confidant of the Servant of God and the author of the true history of Father Mechitar's life and virtues.

trymen. The *Life* becomes very brief at the beginning of 1701, i. e. when the Congregation was founded. For after-events the writer then refers the reader to the *Annals of the Congregation* compiled by himself. Father Matthew's *Life* turning out so imperfect, it was not printed, and so one of his great admirers, Stephen Akonz Koeber, third Abbot-General and titular Archbishop of Siunia, supplied what was wanting to make the *Life* complete. However, Father Matthew's version was thought so much of, that it was read regularly every year in the refectory before the very disciples of the Servant of God, according to the testimony made before the sacred judges in the first Process of 1845 by another Father Matthew, called Maghakian, then assistant-general. It is even recorded by this Father and by other witnesses that from Mechitar's disciples they had heard of many other virtuous deeds of his, which were common talk, but were not narrated by Father Matthew.

As we have already noticed, he wrote also the *Annals* of the Congregation. Nor are these printed. They date from the year 1701, that is, from the foundation of the Congregation at Constantinople. The facts are related in chronological order with an exactitude and a simplicity which is striking. It is a work of great importance, not only for the Mechitarian Community but also for all those who would wish to study the history of the Armenian and Latin churches of those times in the East and, above all, in Turkey. But in an especial way is it the history of the interior life of the Mechitarists and of the family's relations with its missionaries and compatriots. It continues down to the election of Mechitar's successor in 1750, he himself dying in 1749.

These *Annals* were then taken up by Father John Baptist Aucher and compiled by him until the year 1799, when the successor of the founder died. A learned theologian was Father Aucher, and a member of several religious academies in Rome. While at Venice he was an intimate friend of Father

Maur Capellari, afterwards Gregory XVI, who never ceased to honour him with the kindness of earlier days. He (Father Aucher) was a man of great erudition and far-advanced in sanctity, a writer of numerous learned works, among which may be mentioned twelve volumes containing the lives of the Saints of the Armenian Calendar—a treatise of inestimable value and the source of much martyrological and patristic information. When writing the *Annals*, he kept to the same chronological method as Father Matthew, thus showing himself worthy of following in the footsteps of Abbot Mechitar's renowned secretary¹.

1. Father Matthew of Eudocia left behind him many other writings, some of which have been printed, while others have remained in manuscript.

There have been printed: —

1. *Life of St. Gregory the Illuminator*, written in classical Armenian, in a pure, elevated style. Printed 1749.
2. *The Mysteries of Religion*, a demonstration of the truth of the Catholic Faith. Printed 1775.
3. *Meditations on the Sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Printed 1759.
4. *Praises to the Glory of the Most Holy Virgin*. Printed 1775.

In manuscript: —

5. *The History of the Life and Martyrdom of the Blessed Priest, Ter Comitas*. A work quoted and greatly praised in the *Summary* for the introduction of the cause of the Servant of God, Ter Comitas, published by the bereaved Armenian Archbishop Mgr. Paschal Rubian.
6. *Guide to the Contemplative Life*, three parts. Here shines forth the author's mortified and holy life.
7. *Elements of Logic*, from the ancient philosophers.
8. *The First Part of Philosophy*.
9. Other manuscript works incomplete or copied from his master; also various *Counsels* and *Instructions*.

III

The *Life of Abbot Mechitar*, by Archbishop and Abbot-General Stephen Akonz Koever, in Armenian, — *Gleanings from the Life of Abbot Mechitar*, by Father Baptist Ancher, in Armenian and Italian. — Depositions given on oath in the first Process in 1846 for the introduction of the Cause of Beatification of Abbot Mechitar. — The *Life of Mechitar Abbot* by Father John Torossian in Armenian. — The *Mechitarian Congregation and its merits in East and West*, by Father Basil Sargissean in Italian.

Archbishop Stephen Akonz Koever, third Abbot of the Mechitarian Congregation, who compiled a new *Life of Abbot Mechitar* on the lines of Father Matthew's composition, was born of noble parents in Giurgevo, Transylvania, in the year 1740, and entered the community in 1757, eight years after the founder's death, while every souvenir of the latter was still fresh, and his disciples were still alive. He therefore not only gave a better shape to the *Life* written by Father Matthew (whom he greatly admired and whose company he frequented) but added some new circumstance which he had heard from these disciples. However he maintained the same method in relating events, and so made out of the former work a masterpiece of narration and classical diction, which everywhere breathes simplicity and soundness of judgement, piety and filial affection for a common father. Archbishop Akonz, a man of vast learning, correct judgement and no ordinary erudition¹, had a noble and aristocratic bearing, which he inherited with the blood of the Counts Akonz Koever. At the same time he

1. So is he called by various witnesses in the Process for the Introduction of the Beatification of the Servant of God.

possessed the monastic spirit of contemplation, acquired by assiduous reading of Holy Scripture and the Fathers, united to the spirit of discipline which caused him to be revered as exemplary head and a venerated leader¹.

The *Life of Abbot Mechitar* which he wrote, will always remain a beautiful and inspired work, and fundamental for the history of the beginnings of the Congregation. At the end he added an account of the labours and miracles of the Servant of God of which he had been an ocular witness.

For the space of a hundred years all subsequent biographies are but so many compendiums of Mgr. Akonz' work, such as '*Historical Notes on the life of Mechitar Abbot*' by Father Baptist Aucher, the famous theologian who continued the *Annals*. It was printed in Armenian and Italian in 1819, and again in 1906, but this time in Italian only. After Father Matthew's work, among other sources worthy of special attention on account of their inestimable importance, come the testimonies and depositions of the old members of the Congregation who had conversed with disciples of the Servant of God, among whom were the two Archbishops Somalian and Papasian. The last-mentioned, who was then *Ordaining - Bishop* for the Armenian clerics in Rome, made his deposition at Rome, as did also his successor in the same office, Mgr. Edward Hurmuz, both of them of Mechitar's Community. Interesting too are the depositions of Mgr. George Hurmuz, Archbishop and Abbot-General after Mgr. Somalian, and of Fathers Aucher, Elias Tomagian, David Germakian, Maghakian, and Alishan, all famous names in the history of the Congregation. Among the declarations sent by absentees, spe-

1. The writer of these pages had the good fortune to know some old fathers who had been ordained by Archbishop Akonz and to witness the enthusiasm with which they used to speak of him. He knew also an old priest who had lived with some of the founder's disciples.

cial reference is due to the filial letter of Archbishop Arisdaghes Azarian, Abbot-General of the Mechitarists of Vienna, which sings the praises of the heroic virtues of the Servant of God, his fervent devotion to the Mother of God and his unqualified obedience to the Holy Roman Church. All these (and many others) made their depositions on oath with enthusiasm and evident emotion in the first Process for the Introduction of the Cause of Beatification. It was set on foot partly in Rome, partly in Venice, while his Eminence Cardinal James Monico, native of Riese, Venice, was Patriarch. He was assisted by a group of leading members of the illustrious Venetian clergy, among whom were Monsignori Molinari, Trevisanato, (the future Cardinal-Patriarch), Bravin, Falier, Rubelli, Zinelli, Messaglia, Fabris, and others, several eminent theologians and canonists, of whom some were bishops.

This Process was interrupted by political changes in Venice, when the city was besieged and witnessed terrible scenes for a year and a half. The Mechitarian Congregation was itself reduced to dire straits and could only take up the Process again in 1901, when it was eagerly and devotedly set on foot at Venice, *da capo*, under the auspices of the esteemed Cardinal-Patriarch Joseph Sarto, afterwards Pope Pius X. He, too, was a native of Riese, Venice.

But all the Biographies of the Servant of God, since they were written in the classical and literary tongue, were inaccessible to the great majority of the Armenian people. On the occasion of the bicentenary of the Mechitarian Congregation (1701 - 1901), the academic council of St. Lazarus' island, commissioned one of its' members, Dr. John Torosian, to compose a *Life* of Abbot Mechitar in the spoken tongue, which would be within the reach of all. Thus there first saw the light a work which must be acknowledged the most complete and detailed biography of all, a literary work of clear yet stylish expression of thought, and forming most attractive reading.

Praiseworthy, too, is the short historical sketch of Mechitar's life written in Italian by Father Basil Sargissean, another erudite mechitarist, and published in the *Benedictine Review*, Rome¹.

Then the panegyrics, the sermons, the poems all tracing out the Abbot's life and written by the Mechitarist Fathers, amount to some hundreds. Similarly, his moral life and his intellectual activity are to be found narrated in all books bearing on ecclesiastical and political Armenian history, from the famous Mechitarist historiographer Father Michael Ciamcian (1785) down to the writers of to-day.

All these facts were deemed necessary for the reader to know, before he set about conning the following pages, which do not pretend to any literary merit beyond a great simplicity in narration, if simplicity can still be called a literary merit; but, in recompense, they have been written on first-hand knowledge of the most authentic sources, together with such an acquaintance of the vicissitudes and political and religious conditions of the east, as birth, education and a long intercourse with the oriental world can provide.

The years of Abbot Mechitar's life unfolded themselves contemporaneously with crises which greatly impeded the diffusion of Catholicity in the Orient, and the difficulties to be met with had their roots deep down in the people themselves, on account

1. P. B. SARGISSEAN, *La Congregazione mechitarista e le sue benemeritenze nell'Oriente e nell'Occidente*, in the *Rivista Storica Benedettina*, Ist. year (1906) pp. 161-183; 334-363; 560-578;

Under the comprehensive title just given, Father Sargissean intended to compose an extensive work, which would have been very useful to all, but in the *Rivista Storica Benedettina* he published only the first part which comprehends the Abbot's Life. He published in Armenian a volume of *Mechitarian literature* with many notes on Mechitar and his disciples. I have had the pleasure of reading another unedited work which describes the *Mechitarist Missions*.

of the particular status of religion and politics in the land. Nevertheless the numerous enterprises set on foot for the spread of the Catholic church, and maintained during his life and afterwards by his sons, and very soon, too, by other competitors among the regular clergy, particularly in the Lebanon, attest with what courage they were all animated in guiding their country in the paths of the true religion. The Lord blessed their zeal and their efforts through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, to whom the Armenian people is greatly devoted, and through the blood spilt for the faith by so many of the priests and laity. Among these stands out in brilliant colours the Armenian martyr, Ter Comitas, a Catholic secular priest, whose story, which we shall have occasion to relate, has been written by Father Matthew in enthusiastic yet simple words.

This Catholic movement gave rise to the institution of the Armenian-Catholic Patriarchate of Cilicia by the Sovereign Pontiff, Benedict XIV, in 1742, with many privileges.

No adequate idea of these matters can be had by one who has not an exact knowledge of those times and places. To supply such information will be the work of the present writer, who glories in being a humble, devoted son of the Servant of God, Mechitar, of the Patriarch St. Benedict and of St. Antony the Abbot.

St. Francis, who made Brother Leo write that there is no *perfect happiness* in this life, to the little 'sheep's' question, 'Father, I ask you in the name of God to tell me where perfect happiness is', answered and bade him *write* 'In voluntarily bearing, for the love of Christ, sufferings, injuries, opprobrium and hardships; because in all *other gifts* of God, we cannot glory, since they are not ours but God's'.

This sublime humility of St. Francis was felt by Mechitar, as also was the fire of his love for God, together with the longing to be of use to his country in the ways of truth, faith and knowledge. This was the motto of his life, as he confesses at the end

of his edition of the Bible, a work for which he received the august congratulation and paternal blessing of Pope Benedict XIV.

Since the whole life of Mechitar is reflected in that confession, it seems an opportune place to insert it in this *Introduction*.

He writes, 'St. Paul wished to be anathema by Christ for his brethren and relations. That does not mean that he loved his people more than Christ, *from the love of Whom no one could separate him*, but he wished to show the depth of his love for the well-being of his nation. He therefore worked for it with his whole soul nor did he ever tire, though persecuted. In the same way, I also, wishing to follow in the footsteps of the Apostle, as long as I can, as long as I live, shall make every effort to work for the spiritual good of my country, even though sometimes I am despised or shall be despised by some of my countrymen for the truths of my faith. Let those therefore know who think of me and sit in judgement on me, that, although I love my country and work for it, that does not diminish in my heart the love for the orthodox faith of the Holy Roman Church; and viceversa, though in all things I submit and will always submit to the authority of the See of Rome, that does not cool my love nor my desire to work for the betterment of my country (even though for this very obedience I may be contemned by some)'.

These few lines form a faithful portrait of Mechitar's soul: the love of his Lord, the love of his neighbour. Hence came the motive of his every endeavour to serve his Lord and benefit his country, then in such spiritual and moral distress.

All this will become clear in the following *Life* of him.

CHAPTER I.

Childhood of Mechitar.

1. Birth of Mechitar. — 2. Elementary education from a priest. — 3. Longing for the monastic life from very childhood. — Flight to a cave. — 4. State of public education at that time in Armenia. — 5. The two holy sisters Manasse and Mary. — 6. The brothers John and Alessius, anchorites. — 7. Manasse and Mary make a vow of virginity. Overbearing conduct of Manasse's betrothed. — 8. The austere and contemplative life of the two virgins. — 9. The child Mechitar consigned to their direction. — Revelations from God. — 10. Penitent life of young Mechitar. — He obtains from his parents the permission to enter a monastery. — He is ordained deacon.

1. The Servant of God Mechitar was born of 'pious parents' in the city of Sebaste in Asia Minor, 17th of February, in the year of salvation, 1676. His father's name was Peter and his mother's Shahrstan. Peter was a merchant of good standing and lived in the same house with other two married

1. F. Matthew of Eudocia, *Life of Mechitar Abbot*, Chap. I. In the 1st Process all the witnesses deposed that although at that time there was not an official separation between catholics and schismatics among Armenians, nevertheless Mechitar's parents were of the class which was conspicuously Catholic, and acknowledged the supremacy of the 'Pope of Rome'. The proofs of this will appear below. cf. Chap 1. §6. Note.

brothers. All three prayed to God to give them the blessing of a son, and so the birth of Mechitar—the fruit rather of grace than of nature—was the source of joy to the three brothers, among whom the infant was from the first an object of special care and affection. At the baptismal—font there was given him the name of Manugh (which in Armenian means *child*) in honour of the Child Jesus. Later on, when he took sacred orders, he changed his name to that of Mechitar, his great—grandfather's name, which in Armenian means *consoler*¹.

2. When he was five years old his parents procured for him a master in the person of a good priest, who had to teach him to read, and to recite his prayers by heart. Mechitar, by nature docile and diligent, showed extraordinary capability and in a short time learned to read correctly. He made a study of handwriting and soon wrote and copied with rapidity. A stranger to childish games and amusements, he was always so obedient, meek and grave as never to give his parents or preceptor any occasion for reprehending him. His great delight was to commit to memory sacred poems and the hymns sung in church. Rising early in the morning he would hasten to church to intone the psalms of the Divine Office in the middle of the choir, as is the custom in the Levant. When choir-service was over, he would remain yet a long time in church, to pray silently and fervently to our Divine Saviour and His Virgin—Mother, to whom the child had a filial and altogether indescribable devotion from the first day he recognised her as a mother.

3. His parents and both of his uncles were for giving him an education which would equip him in the future for the continuance and furtherance of

1. He was never called Manugh Mechitar (as the Catholic Encyclopaedia says) but Manugh or Mechitar. In letters to found below he signs himself Mechitar of Peter, or Mechitar, son of Peter, and once Mechitar Peter (Tr).

their business, but Mechitar, while yet a child, often told them that he wanted to be an anchorite. What is more, urged on by this holy thought and following an interior call, when he heard the Gospel-story in which is described the grand figure of the Baptist, who lived in the desert and fed on wild honey and locusts, and when he read the lives of the anchorites of the Thebaid or the other champions of the faith who populated the solitudes of Armenia, he was seized with such an ardent desire to imitate them that he pined for the day and the hour when he could inflict on himself such holy austerities. Like St. Theresa of Jesus and St. Catherine of Sienna, (the former of whom tried to flee with her brother into Barbary to be martyred¹, while the latter retired to a grotto far from the city to pray the more freely²) the child Mechitar persuaded a companion to retire secretly into one of the caves in the outlying country for the same reason, sincerely believing that an angel would bring them food. But God, who arranged that Theresa, while on the point of embarking, should meet an uncle of hers to take her back home, and who miraculously restored Catherine in her sorrowful plight at finding herself all alone, guided the steps of Mechitar's parents who had been searching the country-side for the two fugitives, to the spot where the runaways were hiding, and where they found them trembling and in tears³. However this event made him known to all the ecclesiastical au-

1. 'Life and Letters of St. Theresa' by H. J. Coleridge. S. J. Vol. 1, p. 9.

2. 'Life of St. Catherine of Siena' by her confessor, Blessed Raymond. Ch. 2.

3. Archbishop Koeber, *Life of Abbot Mechitar*, p. 4. After relating the incident, he adds that he heard it from Mechitar's disciples to whom the servant of God had himself narrated it, as a warning to submit all our zealous projects to a spiritual director.

thorities, and Bishop Anania, Superior of the Monastery of Sourb-Nishan (Holy Cross) conferred minor orders on him.

Was not this an evident sign of Mechitar's interior dispositions and of his future career? The desert and solitude speak to us of God. We read in the life of the Seraphic St. Francis of Assisi that while still young, he gave up the company of his friends, and used often to betake himself to a cave to pray, either alone or with a companion, who afterwards became a famous personage¹.

When Mechitar was ten years old, his parents saw that the good priest to whom they had entrusted their son's education, was no longer a help to him. The young boy would ask about spiritual things and the Sacred Scriptures, and his instructor would, to his great confusion, be at a loss what to answer. But to whom could one turn then, when colleges and parochial schools were wanting?

4. At that time, under the Islamitic domination of Persians and Turks, there were no such things as Christian public schools, and anyone who wished a literary or theological education was obliged to frequent some monastery where doctors, called in Armenia *Vartapiets*, gave private lessons in grammar, philosophy and theology. These, having the vow of chastity, lived in monasteries outside of and far away from the cities, and there also resided with them a bishop as superior, who was moreover, as a rule, the Ordinary of the diocese.

The priests who dwelt in the city and were married, and who formed the secular clergy, generally had had a poor education. The *Vardapiets*, who alone had permission to preach, often travelled from one monastery to another, taking with them some pupil. These disciples were taught gratuitously but were obliged in return to serve their master. When they had arrived at a certain age or a certain pro-

1. Thomas of Celano, *First Life*, Chap III.

iciency in study, had they the intention of remaining monks, they were ordained priests by the bishop of the monastery. They then continued to prepare themselves for preaching, and after a kind of examination and a testimony of capability presented by the *people*, they received the doctor's degree with a peculiar ecclesiastical ceremony, which entitled them to carry about the doctor's *staff*, and they were called Vardapiets. This staff had, at its summit, the shape of two serpents whose bodies were interlaced and whose heads looked at one another. It is similar to the pastoral staff of a Greek bishop¹.

As regards secular priests, who did not observe celibacy, the *people* presented to the bishop certain worthy persons whom he was at liberty to ordain or not, according to information received. These priests, though often enough good characters, left much to be desired in the line of education. Rather one should say that the majority were hopelessly ignorant and scarcely able to read. They lived in the city with their families for whose maintenance they often applied themselves to some trade.

5. After these remarks on schools in Lesser Armenia, one can easily imagine the difficulties which Mechitar's parents had to encounter in seconding their son's wishes in the matter of study. Near Sebaste was the above-mentioned monastery of Sourb-Nishan, but how could one send a child out of the city all alone? It was then that Divine Providence entrusted Mechitar's education to two maiden sisters who lived in the house opposite. The elder was named Manasse, the younger Mary. Since there was no convent in the town, they lived a kind of monastic life at home, giving themselves up to prayer and works of charity. Their mother, a very holy woman, lived with them under the spiritual direction of a venerable, old priest named Don Paschal Harutium, who would come every day to

1. See Frontispiece.

to give them a spiritual conference and, explain the Holy Scriptures or the martyrology of the day. These sisters had two brothers, monks in the hermitage of Lim, well known for their austere and contemplative life, and an object of envy to their sisters, inasmuch as they could serve the Lord far away from the tribulations and scandals of the world.

It is not our intention to weave here the life of these two doves, these 'wonderful and spotless lilies flourishing in our dry times' as Father Matthew calls them, but we cannot but record in a few words their great virtues and penances, which, by divine dispensation, had a vivifying influence on the whole life of the Servant of God, Mechitar. Manasse and Mary, trained by their mother in the principles of sound doctrine and a Christian life, lived at home entirely given up to prayer and spiritual reading, and their mother, leaving the household duties to the care of a servant, would often join her daughters, now become a shining example of Christian virtue to all the young maidens of Sebaste, who repaired to this dwelling as to a cloister.

6. The ardour and piety of these saintly sisters in serving the Lord continually, in renouncing everything and in striving after the greatest perfection, increased more and more after the arrival in the town of two anchorites, brothers, John and Alessius, followers and imitators of the virtues of their holy namesakes, who voluntarily embraced the most squalid poverty. These two, after many years passed in a small cave in contemplation and penance, where they prayed on their knees all day long, ate only herbs, and slept on the bare ground, yielded by divine inspiration to the tearful pleadings of their mother, now a widow and very poor, and came to reside in the city of Sebaste, to work for her and help her.

Their coming was all the more evidently a disposition of divine Providence, when it was seen that they passed the greater part of the day praying, meditating on death and instructing the people in the true faith and in a penitential life. Among those

who assembled to hear them speak and receive edification, were to be noticed the two sisters.

But the great veneration thus shown by the people towards the two anchorites aroused the envy of the secular clergy in the district, and hence arose hateful persecutions, even on the part of the bishop residing in a monastery some distance from the city. The two champions bore up with humility and resignation whatever trial Satan had prepared and God had permitted, and remained in Sebaste to help their aged mother as long as she lived; on her death they returned to their life of contemplation and penance in a distant hermitage. However they left behind them in Sebaste many holy and fruitful souvenirs, amongst which is to be reckoned the angelic *Hail Mary*, that hymn of the heart, full of sweet consolation to all Christians rich or poor, learned or illiterate, a salutation and a prayer, thrilling one with its grand harmony and manifesting in its composition the impress of its heavenly origin. This prayer was until that time quite unknown in Armenia¹.

7. Manasse and Mary, on hearing the inspired words of these ministers of God, burned with the desire of consecrating themselves entirely to Jesus, and, putting aside for ever all earthly thoughts, of choosing Him as their only Spouse and only Love. Mary, the younger of the two and not yet betrothed, cut off her rich and beautiful hair, and, calling herself the spouse of Jesus, made a vow of remaining

1. The teaching of the recital of the *Hail Mary* clearly shows that the two anchorites, who taught it and those who recited it belonged to the Catholic community, and in the first *Process* in 1846, the senior priests who had lived with the disciples of the Servant of God, bear witness to the same fact. The schismatical portion of the Armenian nation would never admit such a prayer, coming as it did from the *West* and being *Catholic*. Hence this simple and fervent invocation of the Blessed Virgin remained the exclusive property of the *Catholic* Armenians.

ever a virgin. Manasse longed to do the same but her mother, prevented her because she was engaged to a young man of influential family, capable of turning Sebaste upside down, in his determination to have his chosen bride, by bringing mother and daughter before the Turkish tribunals. This made the pious mother fear all kinds of scandals; and, on the other hand, who could guess what would be the sentence of a Mahometan judge? For this reason she deemed it prudent to wait yet a while. But Manasse, who prayed without ceasing to our Blessed Lady that she would move her mother's heart, obtained the desired grace; for her mother, of her own free will, granted her her liberty and blessed her fervour. Then Manasse, too, cut off her beautiful head of hair, and informed her intended that she was the sworn spouse of Jesus Christ for all her life, further bidding him to think no more of her. It is very easy to imagine what happened then. First he pleaded with her, then he got angry with her, then he threatened her. The upshot of it was that he had recourse to the Turkish Law-courts, where in his rage he believed he would win a cause now lost for ever, and gain by force what love denied. Manasse, her sister and their mother, all three meek doves nestling in the cleft of Calvary's rock, prayed day and night to our Blessed Lord, the protector of the weak and father of the fatherless, to deliver them from this tremendous evil; and the Turkish magistrate, almost by miracle, let the maiden go. The young man, looking at matters calmly, resigned himself to his fate.

8. The two girls rejoiced with exceeding great joy, and sang hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God, who finally retained them united in the path of holiness. They immediately clothed their tender bodies with coarse hairshirts and put on rough garments. They ate only bread and vegetables, drank only water, and abstained from whatever would in the slightest degree give them ease. They passed the day in prayer and reading, and at night took a little repose on the bare ground, but only after long vigils and

meditations. Their mother often took part in this life of penance. In the morning, they were the first at church to listen to the Divine Office and be fed at Holy Mass with the Sacred Body of our Blessed Lord¹. Humble, meek and kind, in their looks and in their deportment, they displayed a peaceful and innocent gaiety, which is a certain sign of interior tranquillity and contentment. 'Many widows and maidens', says the venerable chronicler F. Matthew, 'following their example, made an offering of themselves to God and remained virgins for the rest of their lives'. These latter, in their free mementos, hastened in such numbers to the sisters' home to assist at some spiritual reading, or listen to the *fercorino* of the venerable old padre, Don Harutian, that that house became quite a temple.

God consoled these twin-like souls with visions and comforts from heaven. One night, while at prayer, they were rapt in ecstasy and saw a man resplendent with light who said to them, 'To-day there died at Rome a great Saint. Whoever fasts and has recourse to his intercession, will receive from the Lord the remission of his sins'. On returning to their senses, they were astonished that they had both had the same vision, and hastened to relate it to others, that they too might thus obtain pardon for their sins. The child Mechitar kept in mind the date of the year in which the vision took place, and he afterwards verified it as that of the death of the grand, saintly Pontiff Innocent XI (1688).

9. In such surroundings and in the light of such examples did our young hero grow up, and everything remained deeply impressed on his mind and heart. He recited prayers together with them, was present at meditation and spiritual reading, and in his leisure hours learned from Father Harutian, a-

1. The Catholic Encyclopaedia is not quite accurate in calling them nuns. They neither belonged to nor founded any congregation of women, nor were they bound to any rule of life. Their vow of virginity was a private one.

(Translator's note).



The vision of the two maidens.

(From a wood-cut of the year 1810).

The words in Armenian characters mean: 'The vision of the two maidens'.

long with a companion, the liturgical chants and the hymns of the Divine Office and of the Mass. Inspired by his two neighbours, he despised all vanities and every material comfort, and had greatly at heart the exercise of penance, finding delight even in privations. He would not eat meat, drank only water and deprived himself absolutely of fruit and sweetmeats — such delicacies at that tender age. He lived on bread and vegetables like his holy teachers: they sought to moderate his zeal, since they had received a revelation from God that this child was destined by the divine mercy to guide many of his countrymen to the light of the true faith and to the practice of a Christian life. On another occasion, at night-time, whilst they were engaged in their customary prayer, they were again rapt in ecstasy, and saw a road which led to a splendid gate, but which was encumbered with snow and ice, and so, absolutely impracticable. A young boy was breaking the ice with a hammer and removing the snow with a hoe, thus clearing up the road. Looking well to see who the lad was, they recognised him as their pupil Mechitar, and asked him why he was thus occupied. He answered, 'That everyone may easily reach the entrance'. On awakening from their stupor, with irrepressible joy they wished to relate the dream to one another, but oh! how they wondered and how they praised the Lord when they learned that both of them had again been signally favoured with such a singular heavenly gift. They were thus confirmed in the belief that young Mechitar was destined by God to prepare and make easy the way to Paradise¹.

10. At the age of fourteen, though his heart bled at the thought of separation from his two instructors, still, knowing that he could never be a monk whilst he remained in that house, he begged

1. At first the two sisters revealed this fact only to their confessor, who afterwards communicated it to others.

his parents and his two uncles to let him retire to a convent. But they opposed his design violently. He kept silent and waited patiently for another year, multiplying his penances and his prayers. He secretly prepared a shirt of goat's-hair and put it on next his skin. To the abstinence from meat and wine he added that of eating vegetables but once every two days. Thus his ardour for the contemplative life and sacred studies increased. Besides frequenting the house of the two maidens already spoken of, he often paid a visit to the brother anchorites, and would return home deeply humiliated at the sight of himself so defective (in comparison with them) in holiness and in the knowledge of spiritual things. When he was fifteen years old, he renewed with great persistency his supplications to be allowed withdraw from the world to some monastery. Again his relatives refused, but fearing lest he might secretly flee to a cloister far away, they acceded to his request, on condition that he would choose the abbey of *Holy Cross*, quite near to Sebaste, so that they might be afforded the opportunity of seeing him often.

Bishop Anania, the superior, already knew him as having received minor orders to serve as acolyte in church, and he was very pleased to have Mechitar near him; and learning from Manasse and Mary of his stainless character, his piety and his knowledge of the ceremonies and liturgical books, the bishop, just then about to raise some other clerics to the diaconate, wished Mechitar to be numbered among them. So, on the following Sunday, he was ordained deacon. On this solemn occasion, as was the custom, he changed his name from Manugh to Mechitar¹. At that time among the Armenians the sa-

1. It was at his ordination and not at his religious profession (as the Catholic Encyclopaedia says) that he changed his name.

To the present day even *secular* priests may change their Christian name at ordination. (*Translator's Note*).

cred orders began with the diaconate, whilst the subdiaconate was not sacred, but was conferred along with minor orders¹. This happened in the case of Mechitar according to the testimony of the senior priests in the first Process, who had heard it from the disciples of the Servant of God.

1. See *Appendix* IV.

CHAPTER II.

Mechitar aspires after perfection.

1. The monasteries of Armenia. — 2. Mechitar in the monastery of Holy Cross. — 3. He departs for Etchmiadzin. — 4. He meets at Erzerum a Latin Religious for the first time. — 5. Life at Etchmiadzin. — Troubled with sore eyes. — 6. Departs for the monastery on the island of Sevan. — The B. V. M. comforts him with a vision. — 7. Mechitar from Sevan comes to Bassen. — 8. Avetic, Bishop of Erzerum. — 9. God saves Mechitar from dangers. — 10. The enthusiasm of Bishop Melchisedech for the deacon Mechitar. — 11. Mechitar returns to Sebaste. — 12. Various Doctors of Theology wish to have him as their pupil — 13. Painful disease in his eyes. — His *Praises* to the B. V. M. — 14. The holy life and death of the two virgins.

1. The founding of monasteries in Armenia goes back to the time of the Apostle St. Bartholomew, as we shall shortly see. Christianity was first preached in Armenia by St. Thaddeus, who was one of the *seventy-two* disciples¹ and visited the country in the year 33. A. D. He converted many to Christ in Southern Armenia, and amongst them the royal maiden, Sandoukt; thereupon St. Thaddeus and the king's daughter, who refused to deny the Christian faith, were martyred by the king. This happened in the year 48 A. D. In the year 49, St. Bartholomew arrived in Armenia, preached the true faith, converted many and was martyred in the year 60. Thus SS. Thaddeus and Bartholomew laid the foundations of

1. See Appendix III.

Christianity in Armenia, and it continued in a succession of bishops, martyrs¹, and faithful until the time of St. Gregory the Illuminator, who, in the year 301, converted the king, Tiridat, the queen, the court and the whole nation.

St. Gregory, son of the satrap Anagh, of Armenia had for political reasons taken refuge in Cappadocia, where he was converted to Christianity. He had a particular attachment to the Byzantine Church, though for two centuries and more, the Syrian Church had a dominating influence in Armenian ecclesiastical affairs. After converting the entire nation with its king, he betook himself to Cesarea in Cappadocia, and was ordained Primate of Armenia by the Archbishop of that place. Well knowing the efficacious influence of monks in diffusing Christian doctrine among the people, he immediately summoned from Cesarea the saintly monks, Anton and Cronites, with forty-four companions. They soon had many more followers, and at St. Gregory's death the number had reached three hundred and ninety-eight. The monasteries were in such a flourishing condition in the 4th and 5th centuries as to put Armenia first in rank among all Christian nations¹.

In the 4th century the Catholicos, St. Nerses I, had 2040 religious houses built. These monasteries

1. Besides the martyrs commemorated by the Armenian Church, mention is made in the Latin martyrologies for the 22nd of July, of *the Ten Thousand Martyrs of Mount Ararat*, put to death in 118 A. D. They are spoken of also by St. Antoninus of Florence and by the Bollandists. Read the: *Collectio brevium memoriarum in honorem Sanctorum martyrum decem mille in monte Ararat*. Rome. 1840. by Peter Marius Heredia del Rio. The stupendous picture of Carpaccio (1450-1520), in the Academy of Fine Arts, Venice, represents this martyrdom in Armenia.

2. From the *Sermons* attributed to St. Gregory the Illuminator: No XXIII.

were often named *Folds* or *Purgatories*¹. On the summits of mountains, on the borders of lakes, among the solitudes of the deserts they sprung up, and took different names according to the nature of the various occupations and austerities practiced in them. Some there were, where the rule was very austere, others where contemplation took the foremost place. Some monks were called the *Continually Praying*, others the *Sleepless*, others the *Wearers of hair-shirts*, others the *Iron-girdled*, others the *Vegetarians*, others still the *Foodless*. The last mentioned, writes the historian Stephen Orbelian, 'were continually engaged in prayer, abstained from soft food, ate only dry bread and drank only water. Silently, humbly, they prayed day and night like so many lamps burning in the sanctuary. No one but the servants ever went out of the monastery'² Then the enclosure was most rigorous; women were interdicted even from the church and had to pray outside the door.

Many of these monasteries were crowded. In the 10th century, in a famous *laura* named the *Doctoral* five hundred monks were living together, all observing the same rule. In the monastery of Haghpad, so renowned for its rich library, more than five hundred were sheltered under the one roof. The same can be said of Horomoz and other hermitages. In the monastery of Naregh, rendered sacred by the name of the great St. Gregory of Naregh, (10th century) 'the study of sacred music was cultivated with brilliant results'³. These holy places were the boast of Christian Armenia in the midst of so many pagan and mahometan peoples. The monks applied themselves to every kind of study, and from their ranks, as from an inexhaustible source of holiness

1. This is the common name for them in the East.

2. Archbishop S. Orbelian: 'Lamentations on the Armenian Nation'.

3. Orbelian, *ibid*.

and culture, there came forth illustrious saints, eminent bishops, eloquent *vartapiets*, erudite historians, profound and subtle philosophers, celebrated poets, famed mathematicians, talented astronomers, learned and admired grammarians¹. The kings often took the Crown-counsellors from these monasteries, where were to be found even Princes of royal blood.

This fervour of the Armenians for founding monasteries extended beyond their own territories, and they had above seventy (whose names we know) in Palestine, and particularly in Jerusalem, and on the summit of Mount Sion. There was one also for nuns.

Speaking of monasticism in Armenia, I must say something also about the important mission of the Dominican Fathers to Nakhitchewan in upper Armenia, whither Pope John the 22nd sent Blessed Bartholomew, surnamed the Small, as his delegate, giving him the rank and title of Archbishop, and decorating him with the pallium. He learned Persian and Armenian; he even wrote in the latter language several sermons and a commentary on the *Six days* of creation. At his death he left his work in a flourishing condition and had successors in the episcopate for 400 years.

This mission of the Friars Preachers, founded in the year 1328, spread to such an extent, that in time it counted 50 priories and 700 religious. Even in Pope Clement the Eighth's day there were 110 Dominicans of Armenian nationality. These were called *Unifiers* because they tried to unite the Armenian and the Latin rites; and this progressive tendency, even in Armenian grammatical construc-

1. In the year 551 A. D., the catholicos Moses of Eghivard, bade the *vartapiet* Athanasius, a monk of the famous monastery of Clagh, founded in the 4th century, compile the Armenian calendar, still in use in ecclesiastical circles. This monastery also produced several well-known historians and chroniclers.

tions, caused much aversion in the clergy, the people and the court.

This fruitful mission, which took its place in Armenian Church History on account of the terrible persecutions and massacres at Ginghiskhan, removed to Smyrna and then to Galata¹ in Constantinople; thus it lost its importance for the Armenians. However the Dominican mission to Mesopotamia did excellent work in Southern Armenia and subsists till this day.

These few words may suffice to show the importance of the Armenian monasteries; but it will not be beyond our purpose to say something about the convents of nuns.

Tradition and ancient Armenian historians attribute the first institution (in Armenia) of virgins in community under a fixed rule, to the glorious Apostle St. Bartholomew, who, on the death of the Blessed Virgin, brought a painting of her from Jerusalem, founded the monastery named *Hokvoz Vank* (convent of souls), placed there the miraculous image, and confided it to the custody of the virgins there gathered together. The worthy historian, Faustus of Byzantium, in the 4th century, speaks of the convent and of numberless miracles.

As time went on, these convents of women also increased in number, and history tells us of various Armenian queens and princesses who abandoned the court for the cloister, and exchanged the purple and luxury of royalty for rough clothing, coarse hairshirts and other austere penances. The Catholicos *Ohannes* in his most interesting History mentions amongst others 'the Queen of Armenia, wife of King Sembat, and her daughter-in-law, who was the daughter of the King of Egeria, and many other princesses'. In the tenth century the martyrology records the monastic life of the disting-

1. Galata is a suburb of Constantinople and the residence of European Christians. Just across the bridge is Stamboul, where the Turkish mahometans live.

nished princess Susama, wife of the powerful Prince George of the Bahlav dynasty, who were the parents of the great martyr Vahram. In the eleventh century the historian Asoghie names among the nuns the queen-mother of King Abas of Kars. In the 12th century we find the 'Royal Virgin Princesses' at the monastery of Kobar, mentioned by the Vardapiet Vartan. Convents for nuns were to be met with in every province and in all the principal towns, and their number was not smaller than the monasteries for men.

Special mention must be made of the convent of the province of Siunik, founded by the princess Shahantukhd, daughter of Varasdertat, King of the Alans. This young lady, gifted with an extraordinary beauty, was given in marriage to the hereditary prince of Armenia. While on the way to the palace of her betrothed, accompanied by a host of cavaliers and surrounded by all the pomp of a nuptial procession, she was attacked by a great number of bold Saracen troopers, who, rushing out from an ambush, put to death all the knights who were conducting the young spouse. The princess invoked the aid of the Blessed Virgin and of St. Hripsime, (a Roman virgin martyred by the king of Armenia in the 3rd century for desiring to remain the spouse of Christ) and lashing her horse with her whip, she precipitated herself and it from a high and rocky eminence. At the bottom, which in ordinary circumstances would have been her tomb, she was found by a veritable miracle unscathed and seated upright on her horse. Thereupon Shahantukhd, after distributing all her goods to the poor, founded, with the help of the Archbishop Primate of Siunik, the famous monastery on the spot where she fell, and there gathered together to the practice of the religious life, a numerous band of maidens. After thirty years spent in contemplation, she died in the odour of sanctity.

But these flourishing monasteries of men and women lost much at the fall of the kingdom of Armenia and Cilicia. The Mahometan invaders — Saracens or Egyptians — destroyed many of them,

robbed them of their treasures, scattered their libraries, and strained every nerve to annihilate these homes of the Christian faith. With the destruction of the churches and monasteries the Divine Office ceased, the Mass-bell was hushed, the fervour of penance and prayer was cooled, and into the monasteries there gradually crept the ease and comfort of a secular life. And so the monks sought means of providing themselves for this new kind of living. Fertile vineyards, personal belongings and private purses became the order of the day. Instead of attending to study, they thought rather of filthy lucre and worldly praise. No more pastoral visits for the needs of the flock! but wandering strolls to gather in money which they often commanded to be paid as taxes. With rare exceptions, monasticism was in deplorable decadence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as many Fathers and writers of the time with profound regret attest¹. The monasteries became colleges inhabited or frequented by persons who wished to cultivate some branch of study. Having no other vow but that of chastity, they were free to travel from one place to another as they chose, or to seek out some *vardapiet* renowned for his philosophical or theological learning. With such ignorance² and dissipation, schism soon stole in quietly, and those monasteries built as beacons to enlighten and guide the faithful and increase their number, became lairs of schismatical opposition and propagandism.

2. Under these circumstances did Mechitar come into the world. Nourished with the good example and holy counsels of the two virgins, educated by reading the lives of the ancient anchorites and

1. cf. Arakel, Vardapiet of Tauris, a historian of the 17th century. Ed. Etchmiadzin. 1884. p. 220.

2. It is said of one bishop-abbot that the only book of Holy Scripture which he knew was Tobias, and he always preached about him.

celebrated monks, he imagined he would find in the monasteries the object of his aspirations and the sublime ideal of a learned and virtuous life. Of a simple and sincere mind, a heart entirely devoted to Jesus and inclined to a contemplative and ascetic life, he sought his spiritual nourishment, shut up in his cell in the monastery of Holy Cross, in the Sacred Scriptures and the holy Armenian Fathers, there being no oral lessons nor sermons nor instruction of any kind.

As he reflected on his own condition, he was grieved and humbled at his ignorance; he saw that he had not even started on the way to perfection, and he looked about for someone to guide him. Sometimes he would hazard a question to some of the older monks, but these in answer would wonder at his madness for study and counsel him to beware of over-application.

It was while he was labouring under these difficulties that there came to Sebaste the delegate of the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin. The Catholicos, as Ecumenical Patriarch, was the head of the Armenian ecclesiastical hierarchy, and resided in the monastery of Etchmiadzin. This delegate of his was a bishop named Michael and had the reputation of being a very learned person. Mechitar, who had had no guide at Holy Cross, wished to make the acquaintance of the scholarly bishop, and struck by the clearness with which the latter commented on the Epistles of St. Paul, which contain the dogmatic and moral theology of our holy faith, and carried away by the praises he heard of the monastery of Etchmiadzin, asked of him and obtained to be allowed to be his disciple and accompany him to Etchmiadzin.

3. The monastery which bears this name is in the Armenian province of Ararat, in sight of the superb Mount Ararat, proud of having received and saved the human race, with the Patriarch Noah and the Ark, on its snowy summit¹. Etchmiadzin was

1. cf. Genesis, ch. XIII, v. 5, and Appendix III.

founded by St. Gregory the Illuminator, who there saw our Saviour descend from heaven, and who built there a church, calling it *Etchmiadzin*, i. e. *the Descent of the Only-begotten*. To the church he conjoined a monastery which at various dates was embellished by intelligent and generous hands¹. It was for a long time the residence of St. Gregory and his successors, until the invasions of the barbarian hordes compelled them to take refuge in other lands and monasteries. Finally, in the year 1441, it again



The Monastery of the Holy Cross at Sebaste.

became their fixed see. Etchmiadzin enjoyed the reputation of being the greatest intellectual centre in Christian Armenia. It had an exceedingly rich li-

1. As late as the 17th century, the tourists who visited Etchmiadzin extolled the beauty of the stupendous church, and Tavernier (1605-1686), in describing it, says, 'There are in it to-day richer ornaments than in any other church in Christendom', *Voyage en Arménie*. Tournefort, the celebrated botanist, (1656-1708) describes the country with enthusiasm and calls it, a 'terrestrial paradise' and a 'botanic garden'.

brary and jealously treasured thousands of Armenian manuscripts and a host of most precious objects of archeological interest. Her Catholicoi were not always in communion with the See of Rome. Nevertheless many of them wished to acknowledge the Roman Pontiff as their spiritual Head and to render him homage¹.

In the year 1701, that is to say, when Mechitar lived there, and afterwards also, Etchmiadzin was in communion with the Church of Rome. This is witnessed by the beautiful, fraternal letter addressed by Pope Clement XI to the Catholicos Nahabiet².

1. Later on, when the Church of Etchmiadzin separated from the Church of Rome, Pope Benedict XIV erected in the year 1742 the Catholic Armenian Patriarchate of Cilicia, with its residence at Zummar in the Lebanon. This see was transferred in 1852 to Constantinople where it obtained civil recognition and privileges from the Turkish Government, including the title *Patrik*, in every way similar to the Greek and Gregorian Patriarchs. For more details see Appendix IV.

2. POPE CLEMENT XI.

TO OUR VENERABLE BROTHER NAHABIET, PATRIARCH OF THE ARMENIAN NATION.

Venerable Brother, Health and Apostolic Benediction. An opportune occasion has now been afforded you of testifying to the singular devotion which your fraternity has elsewhere shown towards this Holy See, by Our beloved sons, Peter Martyr of Parma, Corradinus of Valletelina, Archangel of Brescia, Anthony of Poschiavo, and an Armenian Joseph Mary, all of the Order of St. Dominic, whom We are sending to Persia from the Priory of St. Sabina, for no other reason than to bring spiritual aid to the Armenian people who are so dear to Our heart. We are confident, therefore, that you, by your good-will towards Us, will gladly receive the forementioned heralds of the Gospel and labourers in the Lord's vineyard, and We repeatedly exhort you to help them on, and, when occasion demands, to defend them in Our name with all charity. This will be very pleasing to Us and will secure

MONT - ARARAT



Mount Ararat, where the Ark of Noah rested.

The Pontiff warmly recommends to his care and protection some sons of St. Dominic, sent by the former from the Priory of St. Sabina in Rome, on a mission to the Armenians of Persia.

Mechitar was delighted at the prospect of going to Etchmiadzin, hoping there to find a more austere environment and a home of ecclesiastical studies¹. It was the month of December, 1691, when the cold was bitter and the snow lay deep on the ground, that the bishop and Mechitar set out for Erzerum. The bishop had two horses, a saddle horse, on which

to you always Our very best wishes, which, when an opportunity presents itself, We shall not fail to express, whether to yourself by a special letter, or to others of your nation who may come to Rome; these, too, We shall receive with paternal affection, as we have hitherto done. For, besides the attraction which for a long time We have felt towards them, a special motive urges Us now to love them, in that We, though unworthy, now govern the Church of God, that most dutiful Mother, who, while She readily receives all who come to Her, with singular joy embraces the people from your country, remembering, as She does, how in the Pontificate of Blessed Sylvester of holy memory they were joyfully provided with the rich fruit of the Gospel, at a time when there first began to glitter on regal foreheads our Redeemer's cross.

There comes also as another incentive to Our paternal devotion, the consideration of the evils which have harassed this same people for so many centuries, from which We earnestly desire them to be freed. Our wish in the first place is that all of this nation, who bear the name of Christian, may return, especially with your help, to the former unity with the Church of Rome, the Mistress and Parent of all Churches. As a pledge of Our Pontifical esteem We most willingly impart the Apostolic Blessing.

Given at St. Peter's, Rome. 20th April. 1703 (*Ex Epist. et Brevib. Select. Edit. Rom. 1724. page 48*).

1. This thirst for sacred studies we find also in St. Ignatius of Loyola, when he received from God the inspiration of founding a society for preaching the holy truths. For this purpose he visited several Academies and Universities. *Ribadeneira*. Bk. I. ch. XIII.

he mounted and a pack-horse, which carried his bed and his belongings. Mechitar having no money to buy a horse, and not wishing to ask his parents for any, followed his master on foot through the snow and over the ice. From time to time the young sixteen-year-old boy used to get up on the pack-horse, arranging himself in some way on the bed, but this strange mode of riding was most uncomfortable and a real torment. They journeyed by day and passed the night in some caravanserai, where Mechitar often slept in the court-yard with the animals, shivering all night long on account of the intense cold. In this way they arrived in a few weeks at Erzerum, the capital of Armenia.

There at the door of the church, Mechitar saw and with unspeakable joy bought the golden book of *Christian Meditations* in Armenian, which became almost his treasure. He read it with his eyes and with his heart, and was never tired of reading it, experiencing in the meditation of those sublime truths so simply expressed, a contentment that held him closely bound to this invaluable booklet. This enthusiasm of his for a book of Western origin displeased Bishop Michael, who bade him put it aside and read the psalms or other choir-books. The young man obeyed, and his eagerness for reading these new books was soon noticeable to all. In the church at Erzerum, his reading of the Epistle and other prayers so fascinated everyone, that the people flocked to the holy temple of God to listen with spiritual pleasure to the open and expressive reading, coming from the firm yet sweet voice of the Servant of God.

It was at Erzerum that he saw for the first time, in the company of Bishop Michael, a religious, whom from his habit he guessed could not be an Oriental. He asked him who he was and where he came from. 'I am a *Frank*', answered the other. At that time all Europeans were called Franks in the East. Mechitar completely ignorant of what existed or happened beyond the confines of the Levant, asked of what nation the Franks were, what kind of

Christianity they practised, and asked other questions particularly on the subject of religion. In this way he learned many things; for instance, that that religious was the member of a Society called by the holy name of our Lord Jesus, that the Christian religion was freely professed in Europe in the light of day. He came to know also of the learned and disciplined Catholic Hierarchy whose members were linked to Jesus Christ in the person of the Pope, of the numberless religious orders, of the sacred studies, and of the city of Rome, the home and inexhaustible fountain of all philosophical and theological knowledge, and the unerring teacher of the Christian truths. It was then that there rose in his mind, and took deep root in his heart, the desire of going to Rome, which was commonly called at that time in Armenia the *City of SS. Peter and Paul*. But how climb the mountains to get to the sea, and how cross the sea to get to Rome! Where the wings, where the means for one who possessed nothing!

He was disturbed in his dreams by the order of Bishop Michael that it was time to set off for Etchmiadzin, the bishop's residence. During all that long journey the same painful wintry cold attended him as in the first stage from Sebaste to Erzerum. Mechitar, his thoughts fixed on the much-coveted goal which smiled on him from afar like a vision from heaven, appeared indifferent to everything under the guidance of his angel-guardian always by his side.

5. They arrived in Etchmiadzin in February of the year 1692. The Catholicos and all the bishops and doctors, who are always in great number at the monastery, received the delegate with all the honour due to his rank and person, he being one of the most influential and learned members of the community, and a counsellor of the *Holy Synod* for the management of Armenian ecclesiastical affairs.

However there entered into his mind some suspicions about his pupil Mechitar. The subtle questions of the Servant of God on the monasteries of the West were a bitter draught to the bishop who



The Cathedral of Etchmiadzin after the restorations towards
the end of the XVIIIth century.

sought pretexts for scolding him, for preventing him reading about them, and went even so far as to beat him¹. What is more, when he was to explain to his disciples the Epistles of St. Paul or some other important book, he would dismiss the deacon Mechitar to punish or mortify him. The Servant of God, who was burning with the desire for knowledge, was thus no longer a disciple in study but the least of the bishop's servants.

It was the custom in the monastery for everyone to rise at midnight to recite the night-office and Matins. In the evening when all had retired, Mechitar had to wait until his master had gone to bed, for he had to put everything in order. Then he lay down to sleep as best he could, often in a corridor which led to the bishop's apartments. Tired with the fatigues of the day he fell like a dead body into a deep sleep. But soon the rising-bell rang for going to church and our hero, though with great difficulty, was on his feet long before the bishop. When the others went back to rest, he remained where he was, for he had to prepare a great deal in the morning for his hard task-master, and thus the early hours passed until the dawn came to greet his ever-serene countenance.

This loss of sleep and the prolonged reading at night in the dim light of an oil-lamp, brought about an inflammation in the eyes which threatened to deprive him of his sight. He was now incapable of any work, pitied by no one, abandoned and suspected by all, and not one person seemed inclined to help him in spiritual matters or teach him theology. The bishop, who had promised him much and made him hope for more, treated him simply as an unpaid servant.

6. He was labouring under these painful circumstances and being tried by so many tribulations

1. cf. Father Matthew, *Life*, etc. p. 55.



The hermitage on the island of Sevan.

when Providence, which watches over saints and sinners, and disposes and transmutes human events to bring about its own unchangeable designs, so arranged matters that there should just then arrive on a pilgrimage to Etchmiadzin a fellow-citizen of Mechitar's, Stephen by name, who, after fulfilling his vow there, was to go on a similar errand to the hermitages of *Khor-Virab* and *Sevan*. Mechitar, before coming to any decision on the matter, went to Bishop Theodore, the administrator of the monastery, a prudent man and one venerated by all, disclosed to him the state of his health, his spiritual condition and his deficiency in knowledge, and asked his advice. Theodore was moved at the state of the young deacon, encouraged him and advised him to follow his friend to Sevan, without informing Bishop Michael where he was going, lest he should be overwhelmed by his menaces and compelled to remain. He also promised him his protection.

Mechitar made known to Stephen Theodore's counsel, and that very night, after a terrible two month's stay in Etchmiadzin, departed with him in the direction of Sevan. The two young men visited, near the castle of *Ardashad*, the hermitage of *Khor-Virab* (which in Armenian means *Deep Well*), into which St. Gregory the Illuminator was thrown by King Tiridat of Armenia after unmentionable tortures, and where he lived miraculously for fifteen years, being provided with bread by an angel; on coming out of it he converted Tiridat, his court and the whole of Armenia. From *Khor-Virab* they passed on to the island of Sevan, on which is built the hermitage of Sevan at a height of 4920 feet above the level of the sea. Tradition says that it was founded in the 9th century by the Catholicos Masdoz, who also reformed the Ritual. The lake and the island are surrounded by mountains whose peaks are in the region of perpetual snow, and which thus formed a strong bulwark against the inroads of the Arabs and Tartars. However in the 10th century the former managed to seize the place and martyr all the monks. But the desert soon flourished anew. Far

away from the world, the monks of this hermitage lived in separate cells, and all wore garments of hair-cloth. They practised the most rigorous penan-



The picture of the Blessed Virgin in the church of Sevan.

ces, chanted hymns the whole day and made innumerable genuflections - all most praiseworthy penances, indeed, but which could not satisfy the soul of

Mechitar, who, besides rigorous disciplines, longed for the study of theology that he might enlighten and strengthen his countrymen in the true faith. Disappointed in his hopes at Sevan too, our young friend was in great distress. His eyes were paining him greatly and the hot, bitter tears which flowed from them all day long almost completely robbed him of his sight.

But with an unbounded confidence in our Blessed Mother, he often in church turned his eyes in agony and in tears to a picture of her which is still venerated there, and spoke to Mary, more with his heart than with his lips, as a loving son to a tender mother; then he would feel reanimated. In one of those silent colloquies the Servant of God was rapt in ecstasy and saw the Blessed Virgin resplendent among the glories of heaven with Manasse and Mary at her right and left. F. Matthew says, 'She stood before him (Mechitar), her face clear and uncovered, dressed in a garment embroidered all over with flowers, without the Infant Jesus in her arms'. Mechitar, stupefied at the vision, was addressed by the young maidens, who told him that this celestial Lady was the Mother of God. She, turning to him with a winning smile, said to him sweetly, 'What do you want? Tell me, and you shall have it'. The Servant of God, illumined by grace which flowed copiously from her who was full of grace, took courage and said, 'Mother of the Lord, I ask what you wish'. The Mother said 'Let it be so' and departed. Recovering from the effects of the vision, Mechitar tasted a comfort that was not of earth but of heaven, an interior strength that supported him all his life, whilst the words of our Lady which many years later he confided only to his confessor, guided him and spurred him on in his holy mission¹

1. At the bicentenary of the foundation of Mechitar's Congregation, celebrated at Venice in 1901, the Catholicos

7. Mechitar, finding Sevan unsuitable, left with his companion for Erzerum, touching Erivan on the way. They journeyed almost entirely on foot, having bought a donkey for the transport of their frail beds and the rest of their effects. In this way they arrived at Bassen near Erzerum. There they were seized with the longing to go and visit the monastery of the *Mother of God*, situated on the summit of a charming hill. The Servant of God, on entering the Church of the monastery, saw a picture of the Blessed Virgin which by its likeness reminded him of his vision at Sevan, and falling on his knees he prayed before it for several hours with the ardour of a seraph. Afterwards he presented himself to the superior of the place, who was a bishop, Melchisedech by name, and humbly kissed his hand. The bishop asked him who he was and why he was so moved. From hours spent in prayer, from the answers of the deacon, from his noble countenance through which shone his intelligence and interior piety, he recognised in him one privileged by grace. He felt a peculiar attraction towards him and entertained him for several days. Then he prayed him to remain in his monastery and teach catechism to the children and to others who wished it in his diocese. Mechitar willingly consented, thinking that thus finally he was beginning to be of use by preaching and teaching the truths of faith. At the same

of Etchmiadzin, Patriarch of the Armenians separated from the Holy See, Baptist Krimian, wished to send the picture of the Madonna of Sevan to the Mechitarist Congregation, as a *national gift*. But difficulties arose, for many were anxious that that sacred souvenir should remain at Sevan. Then the Catholicos had a copy made and sent it to Venice. However this copy has been touched up to cover the ravages of time in the original. What is reproduced here is the original picture in its present state, photographed by the Mechitarist Fathers of Venice.

At this festival there presided His Eminence Cardinal Sarto, Patriarch of Venice, later Pope Pius X.

time he hoped to learn something in this monastery where there was a sufficiently rich library. However, he asked permission to go first to Erzerum, which was a day's journey off, to receive informa-



The Apparition of the B. V. M. to Mechitar.

(From a wood-cut of the year 1810).

tion about his family. He betook himself therefore with his companion to that city, and at the house of persons whom he knew, he found clothing and other things sent him by his parents. He took what

was necessary and sold the rest to buy books. The donkey was also sold to procure other necessities. Then the two friends embraced and said good-bye, and Mechitar with his beloved books set out for Bassen.

At that time the bishop of Erzerum was a certain Avetic, a restless character, who, goaded on by ambitious designs, began to persecute all who praised the Roman Catholic faith. He heard of Mechitar and of his coming to Erzerum; he called him and made him flattering promises: to ordain him priest, to give him the doctor's staff, and other privileges, if he would consent to remain with him. The Servant of God, fearing that Avetic would have sought detain him by force, since the latter had the reputation of being overbearing, put him off with evasive answers and returned to the monastery of Bassen, where the superior received him with great joy. He confided to Mechitar the administration and the care of the church, which the young deacon attended to with an uncommon eagerness and zeal. He also taught catechism, prayed and read instructive books in his free hours.

Meanwhile Bishop Avetic hoped that the deacon Mechitar would shortly return to him, but, since he did not appear, he sent men to capture him and bring him back by force. However Bishop Melchisedech was powerful and equal to the occasion. He gathered together a host of volunteers from amongst his daring compatriots, (the chronicler even says explicitly that they were Kurds), and hunted away the messengers of Avetic. The latter, who had already begun his persecution of the catholics, accentuated his wrath, and, impelled as it were by a blind fury, began to condemn to frightful torments all those who accepted the authority and the sanctity of the Council of Chalcedon and of Pope St. Leo, whom the schismatics wished to condemn¹.

1. See Appendix VI.

Mechitar burned all the more with the desire to study this controversy, strengthen the Catholics in the faith and defend the truth with a clear conscience. Fortunately there happened to be among the collection of interesting books at his disposal, a manuscript which treated precisely of the Oecumenical Council of Chalcedon. He read it for several nights with great avidity, mastered the Catholic doctrine, taking care to have always ready at hand the suitable and telling quotations, and set about explaining with such enthusiasm, to the ignorant and dissident, the truth concerning the holy council and Pope Leo, that evening and often late night would surprise him still intent on explaining the question to those desirous to know the truth.

9. To reward him for his zeal for the holy faith, God saved him from many bodily and mental dangers. There came in those days to Erzerum on the way to Etchmiadzin a certain Bishop Lazarus, who knew Mechitar since the time he dwelt in Sebaste, and had used, but to no purpose, every pressure to have him as his disciple. On meeting him again, the bishop repeated in persuasive language his wish to bring him away with him, promising to further him in his philosophical studies, in which Mechitar had already acquired no mean fame, to ordain him priest and confer on him the doctor's degree. But the young deacon, who by now had had experience of several monasteries and doctors, answered kindly and wisely that he could not and would not follow the bishop. The latter left in a few days for Etchmiadzin with the Persian ambassador of Constantinople, who was bound for Ispahan. In this circumstance there was shown the will and the hand of the Lord in protecting Mechitar's life. Listen to what his secretary, Father Matthew, recounts in his biography of the Servant of God. 'From the earliest times it has been the deplorable custom among the Persians, that, when their ambassador has arrived at the confines of the Ottoman Empire, his barbarous satellites snatch up young girls and bring them away with them. The Ottoman soldiers, for-

seeing this barbarity, used to attack the ruffians to vindicate their own honour and recover the slaves. So it happened that a serious combat often took place between them, and many were killed. The same thing occurred on this occasion, when the abominable outrage was perpetrated again, and on both sides there was great slaughter. Among those mortally wounded was Bishop Lazarus who was brought back to Etchmiadzin'. The news grieved Mechitar much and he thanked the Most High for having saved him from so great and so certain a danger.

Divine Providence delivered him also from a moral danger which Satan had prepared for him. 'In a village of that province', says the chronicler, 'there lived a rich widow with an only daughter. This woman, seeing that Mechitar was handsome, healthy, peaceable and clever, tried to persuade him to marry her daughter. Not daring to speak to him personally, she sent trusted friends with the proposal and with the promise that she would give all her riches to her daughter. When the chaste and virtuous young deacon heard this, he flew away in great haste and the messengers had to retire in utter confusion'. Mechitar was vowed to the Lord and of the world he wished to hear no more.

10. About this time there was sent to Bishop Melchisedech from the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, Patriarch of all the Armenians, a letter nominating him his delegate in the two provinces in which the Bishop's monastery was situated. This office included the pastoral visit and the collection of tithes for Etchmiadzin. Melchisedech, a good and humble man, but of little learning and in no way a speaker, brought with him as a helper, the young deacon Mechitar, who was now seventeen years old.

The Bishop was received everywhere with great reverence, and the people poured into the church to receive the delegate's blessing and hear the youthful yet learned deacon read and explain the martyro-

logy of the day, teach the catechism and exhort all to virtue and penance¹.

The crowd, much moved and enkindled with enthusiasm, would hardly leave the House of God. All extolled the humility, modesty, deep piety, ready intelligence of the learned deacon and the beautiful, continuous flow of his persuasive eloquence. But more than the people, Bishop Melchisedech rejoiced and beamed with delight, for, as we have seen, he was a man of excessive kindness and humility.

11. While all were contented, Mechitar alone was discontented, because, when put on trial, he felt his own deficiency in the knowledge of dogma. Often did he feel the need of being instructed; often did he look about him for someone from whom to ask advice, but instead of *theologians* he met with *administrators*, and he was disconsolate. No one took the trouble to help him, to give food to that soul hungering after truth. In the beginning of this chapter we spoke of the condition of these abandoned monasteries.

1. When St. Francis of Assisi had gathered together his companions, he went with them to Rome to Pope Innocent the Third, to obtain his permission to preach, *though St. Francis was then but a layman*. At first the Pontiff demurred, but struck with wonder at the words of the Humble Man of Assisi, he thereupon consented and addressed St. Francis and his companions thus, 'Go, my brothers, with the help of God, and preach conversion to all, according as He will inspire you; and when the Omnipotent will increase your numbers, come without fear to me and you will find me disposed to grand you yet more, and so confide to you more extensive fields of labour. Then all the friars threw themselves on their knees before the Pope and swore obedience to him. At his word, the other eleven swore obedience to St. Francis as their head. To him alone was given the permission to preach, with the power of transmitting it to the others. cf. *Tres Socii*, by St. Francis' disciples, Ch. XII, n. 51, 52, and John Jaerghensen, *Saint François d'Assise*, 2 ième partie, Ch. II.

While in these straits his thoughts wandered back to the two anchorites of Sebaste and his two saintly teachers. He was thinking of cutting short his residence at Bassen and hastening to see those heavenly souls — who could speak only of heaven and whose example was a grace from heaven continually urging him to perfection — when news was brought to him that the younger had flown to heaven and that miracles were honouring her body and her grave. He then determined to depart immediately for his home, in order to have the pleasure of seeing once again the other sister, and amidst so many doubts and scruples be illumined by the light of that heaven-inspired soul. It is easy to imagine the keen pain felt by Bishop Melchisedech, and he did all he could to retain him. But the young deacon, who insisted on seeing again in the flesh his spiritual mother Manasse, with words of filial reverence asked the bishop's benediction. The good bishop loaded him with blessings; he also made him a present of the picture of a Madonna¹, on the receipt of which he departed for Sebaste.

At Erzerum he was the guest of a certain Paul, a very pious person, already known to him, who had lately returned from a pilgrimage to Rome, of which he related wonders: the sacred functions, the majestic grandeur and splendour of the churches, the sacerdotal hierarchy, the monastic discipline, the thoroughness of the study of theology and many other things which make Rome the centre of gravity of all the sanctity and culture in the world. Mechitar hung on his lips, was never weary of listening to him, asked a thousand questions, wished to know about everything, even of the journey, and streng-

1. 'This picture of the B. V. M. accompanied Mechitar everywhere and on his death-bed he had it before his eyes. At present it is kept at St. Lazarus, Venice, in the Abbot General's room', — from the testimony of Archbishop Soukias Somalian, fourth Abbot-General of the Congregation, in the st. Process.

thened his own resolve to go to Rome. Paul had in his possession several books, among which were three volumes of Father Clement Galano¹, a Theatine, who had been sent to the East by the Holy See and had written a book on the union of the Armenian Church with that of Rome. Mechitar gathered, like an industrious bee, whatever interested him in those books. As far as his means would al-

1. F. Clement Galano was born at Sorrento near Naples in the year 1610, entered the Theatine Order, studied the Georgian and Armenian languages, and so in the year 1636 was sent as a missionary to Georgia and Armenia. However, after the persecutions and massacres of Dahmaz, king of Persia, his superiors sent him to Constantinople to be of some help to the Armenians. There he formed an intimate friendship with the Patriarch Cyriacus, a meek and gentle personage, whom he persuaded to write a letter of submission to Pope Urban the Eighth (1641). He taught in the Patriarch's own school, dwelt there and wore the costume of an Armenian vardapiet. But on the death of Cyriacus, his successor persecuted him and instigated the Turkish Governor to arrest him as a favourite of the *Franks* and a disturber of the nation's peace. With difficulty did he manage to save his own life (through the intervention of the French Ambassador) and return to Rome. Pope Urban the Eighth, who had founded the celebrated *Urban College* (or *College of Propaganda*), appointed him professor of Armenian, which he taught for twenty years. Alexander VI sent him to Lemberg to help the Armenian archbishop (1662), and there he died at the age of 56. He left behind him the famous work entitled, *'Conciliationis Ecclesiae Armenae cum Romana, ex ipsis Armenorum Patrum et Doctorum testimoniis, in duas partes Historialem et Controversialem divisae. Auctore Clemente Galano, Surrentino, Clerico Regulari Theologo, et Sedis Apostolicae ad Armenos Missionario. Romae. 1658. De Prop. Fide.*

This work was for centuries in the West the most important source of information for those who wished to study the history of the Armenian Church and was always quoted in controversies. However, many points in it have been very learnedly discussed and disputed.

low him, he bought some other works to bring to Sebaste, where he arrived in June, 1693.

12. One cannot tell what joy his parents, the holy maiden Manasse, and his fellow-citizens felt at beholding him again so unexpectedly after such a long and painful absence. The fame of his learning and eloquence had spread everywhere, it was known that various bishops were contending to have him with them, ordain him priest and make him a doctor, and so his parents and friends were sincerely and justly proud of him, and felt greatly attracted to him. Mechitar, having fulfilled his obligations, as a dutiful son and friend, towards his parents and Manasse, did not wish to remain longer under the paternal roof, surrounded with all the attentions and luxuries of home-life, but retired to the monastery of Holy Cross, where with untiring energy he devoted himself to meditation and the reading of Holy Scripture. At recreation-time he explained the catechism and exhorted to penance all who came to listen to him; and this, not only in the monastery, but sometimes also on the public roads.

While he was residing there, two famous *vardapiets*¹, named Gregory and Joseph, happened to pass by the monastery. Both of them wanted to bring Mechitar away with them and ordain him priest, but he declined their proposals. Joseph, who enjoyed the reputation of being a learned philosopher and grammarian, was enamoured of the intelligence, meekness and humility of the Servant of God. To win him over, he explained to him from time to time some part of philosophy, the categories of Porphyrius or the names and species of the derivatives, and other ancient systems. Mechitar listened to the conferences with pleasure and curiosity, but never hearing the vardapiet speak of the love of God or of meditation, he was not taken with the idea of

1. The *vardapiets* were often bishops. They then had more ample jurisdiction. See Appendix IV.

following him, and so, says F. Matthew, he quietly evaded the overtures planned to win him over.

During his stay at Holy Cross, besides attending to spiritual reading, he began to commit to writing the fruit of his devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Among other things he composed in verse that gem of *Praises* to our Holy Mother, whose alternate strophes begin with letters which form names and praises of her. In this Ode he is, as it were, carried out of and far above this sensible world, and with enthusiastic language he calls on our Lady in endearing terms to intercede for him and have mercy on him. This hymn, palpitating with fervour in its enchanting melody is sung even to day, not only in various dioceses during Matins, but, handed down from generation to generation, it has taken the place of worldly songs, and men, women and children often sing it together while at work¹. We must observe, as does the chronicler F. Matthew, that Mechitar was well versed in oriental music and composed also the melody for his hymns.

13. But his uninterrupted work, prolonged far into the night, with nothing but the faint glimmer of an oil-lamp to give him light, caused a fierce inflammation in his already weak eyes. Acute pains tortured the pupils as if nails were being hammered into them and repeated fluxions of blood obscured his sight. On his right eye there appeared a blackish lymph and over his left a lenticular stain of white colour, and it seemed that his sight was lost for ever. Then that indefatigable reader, that fervent preacher of faith and penance retired into a corner of his cell, and now would pray to the Lord for light to his soul, now would recite or sing in an undertone the hymns — at once deeply penitential and breathing wonderful theological lore — of St.

1. I myself, when a boy, often heard my father, mother and aunts sing it. It was very common in all the houses of Armenia, Pontus and the Caucasus.

Nerses the Graceful, which he knew by heart, and now in a moment of inspiration would dictate sacred hymns, to some pious visitor. Among these the one beginning, 'Most holy Virgin, have mercy' is particularly full of pathos and enriched with high and noble thoughts. It is composed of 1,500 lines of a wonderful and genial construction, in which the refrain runs thus, 'When I was blind I made a vow, that thou, O Virgin, might give me sight'. There is another which begins with the words, 'O ineffable home, receptacle of the Word', which is sung to-day by the pious laity, in monasteries and at sacred functions. In all these hymns the dominant idea is unbounded devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin, from whom like a loving son he implored sight for his eyes, if it were for his own good and that of others. And so the deacon Mechitar, eighteen years old, gave himself no rest in his blindness, and in that wintry season, had himself led by the hand on calmer days to Manasse's house to listen to the spiritual reading and teach the catechism to whosoever asked him.

In this way the six¹ months of winter passed by. At the beginning of spring he came to hear that there was a herbalist at Sebaste, who prepared lotions which calmed inflammations in the eyes and cleansed the sclerotic of blood. But since he himself was suffering from pains in his legs, all his patients had to go to his house. Thereupon Mechitar came to the city and lived with his family, where his mother and others were already bewailing the blindness of her dearly - beloved son. He was brought to the herbalist, who in forty days enabled Mechitar to see with his left eye and to walk alone with the aid of a stick. Quite pleased with the result our young friend left his home in May, returned to the monastery of Holy Cross, where for several months he suffered great deal in his right eye, though with

1. In some parts of Asia Minor winter lasts from October to March, so that there is little or no spring.

continual changes for the better, and returned thanks to the Lord for the grace of his recovered sight.

14. That summer Manasse went to sleep on earth to awake in heaven and there join her sister in the realms of eternal bliss. A word or two more must be said about these angelic virgins, the inspirers and guides of the Servant of God from infancy, because their sublime virtue shone with a singular light in their supreme resignation through the most terrible trials of pain and misfortune. They burned with a heavenly love for their Divine Redeemer as their only delight, and so were called to receive their crown of thorns, to show to the world and to the weak the strength of their love and their resolute faith. We have already spoken of their piety and penances; it would be worth while to say something now of their last illness. Through the rigour of their abstinences, the severity of their disciplines and cilices, and their habit of staying up all night, praying to and adoring the Lord and meditating on the eternal truths, — and that during icy winter nights outside the house, lest they should disturb their aged mother — it so happened that the cold and damp filtered little by little into their bodies already consumed by fasts, and weakened their knees, reminding one of the words of the Royal Prophet, 'My knees are weakened through fasting', Psalm 108, 24. Thus they became paralysed and confined as helpless invalids to bed, and their malady was such that any attention of servants in moving them only increased tenfold their excruciating pains. 'The elder sister,' writes F. Matthew¹, was curved like a ball,

1. *Life of the Abbot Mechitar*. Chap III. Father Matthew, who was then at Eudoxia, quite near to Sebaste and was ten years old, must certainly have heard of them and perhaps have seen them. Who in Latium or Umbria, or in the entire world whether young or old, has not heard of Sister Mary Benedict of Viterbo, the Cistercian nun? At the golden jubilee of her dolours, which she had always

and the nerves of the knees and the joints of the loins and the neck were weakened, so that she could neither stand up nor straighten herself, nor go to bed. And so it was that to give her a little rest, her assistants would put a cushion on her breast and another under her chin, and tie her with woollen bands to the rafters of the house, and so keep her suspended for some time. Then this arrangement would so hurt her that after a few minutes the bands had to be loosened and she rolled herself up again. While in this position, her chin, which had been resting on the cushion, had become ulcerated; and her legs and knees, once they were placed one over the other, could not be unlocked..... The younger sister could only rest in one way, and no one could change her posture; and since she always lay on the right side it gradually weakened.

Now these two virgins of Christ, afflicted with such pitiful and painful sufferings, did not complain, nor were they ever overcome with sadness, tedium or impatience. Rather did they suffer with great joy, like the holy virgin Clare, thanking the Lord always and exclaiming often, 'Glory be to thee, O Lord, glory to thee in all things'..... The words that fell from their lips were praises to God and sermons on His word. Moreover, both their intellect, and their senses remained illuminated and undimmed. They never wearied nor ceased from reciting the Divine Office. Their brain was untouched, and very many men and women, not only of the neighbourhood but from distant cities, hearing of their angelic behaviour, came to witness their marvellous life, listen to their vivifying words and profit by them'.

These sufferings of theirs lasted four years, and the two martyrs preserved until the last moment of their life that heroic resignation which is the distinguishing mark of chosen souls. In the midst

borne with joy, there was a most solemn festival crowned with a special blessing of Pope Pius X.

of such pain their sole comfort was in the reception of the sacraments of Confession and Communion; which they received with indescribable fervour and joy, showing even exteriorly that they were wholly united with the beloved Spouse hidden beneath the Eucharistic Species.

In their last hours they suffered no agony nor any darkness nor loss of understanding. Two or three gentle sighs as of the lover to her beloved announced their departure from earth to heaven, and they seemed overtaken rather by a pleasant sleep than by the white hand of death. The younger sister Mary died a year before the elder. At their death their bodies straightened themselves again in a wonderful way and became white and shining. Their reputation for sanctity brought to their funeral from the country round about, many people of every rank and condition of life, and numbers received graces from the Most High by having recourse to their intercession. Mechitar, who had not had the opportunity of assisting at the death of Mary, was at the side of Manasse's deathbed, and with filial grief and veneration accompanied the clergy who conducted her to her last resting-place.

These two holy virgin sisters, who by divine disposition had such an effective influence by their example and their piety on the life of the Servant of God, left their images engraven on his heart and never were they obliterated. To his future disciples, to his future Community he will transmit the revered and never-to-be-forgotten souvenir of the saintly and austere life of his teachers¹.

1. While sending these lines to print I receive notice of the death in Viterbo (Italy), 11th May 1913, of Sister Mary Benedict Frey, Cistercian Nun, called in that city the *Holy Nun* and venerated as such. I mentioned her in these pages because her illness bore a certain resemblance to that of the holy sisters Mary and Manasse. After a serious illness in the spinal cord she was compelled to remain seated motionless in bed for fifty-two years without

CHAPTER III.

Mechitar longs to go to Rome.

1. Ardent desire of Mechitar to betake himself to Rome. — Sets out for Aleppo with the vardapiet Hovnan. —
2. Life in danger at the river Karassû. — Loses his books and writings. — 3. In Aleppo frequents the company of the Jesuits. — Father Anthony Beauvollier. —
4. Sets out for Rome. — At Cyprus falls ill of malaria. — 5. Disembarks ill at Salamis. — Ill-treatment received at the hands of the schismatic monks in the hermitage of St. Macarius. — 6. Charity of a bishop. — 7. Discussions on the Council of Chalcedon and on Pope St. Leo. — 8. For reasons of health he is compelled to return to Sebaste. — 8. At Sebaste and Holy Cross. — He is persecuted by some schismatic monks. — 10. Mechitar ordained priest.

1. On the death of his saintly preceptors Mechitar felt more strongly the wish to perfect himself in the monastic life and in sacred studies, in

ever changing position. She completely lost the use of her left side and her head was kept up by a sash fixed to the wall with little nails. And yet there had recourse to her an immense crowd of persons, labouring under moral or physical pain, and she, ever resigned and cheerful, could always inspire them with comfort and resignation. Pope Pius X. on the jubilee of her illness sent her an autograph letter. The bearer of the letter was Cardinal Casetta. That day in her little room the Cardinal and several Archbishops, Bishops, prelates and priests celebrated Holy Mass.

order to dedicate himself more profitably to his fellow-countrymen in the apostleship of truth. Having visited many monasteries in Armenia, and knowing well by now the unenviable state of discipline and culture prevailing there, he decided to turn his steps to the West and determined to put into execution his ardent desire of going to Rome, there to be instructed and return thereafter to Armenia to preach the truth. A new state of things in the monastery of Holy Cross obliged him to put his design into execution as soon as possible. The superior was Bishop Anania a man of meek and humble character and very virtuous. But another bishop named Isaac contrived by intriguing to get hold of the office, and he immediately turned the community upside down and succeeded in expelling from those walls the little discipline that was left, together with prayer and study, substituting for them contentions and discussions anything but fraternal.

Mechitar resolved to leave at once.

About that time there came to Sebaste a certain Hovnan, vardapiet of Eudoxia, who was on his way to Jerusalem to devote himself to advanced studies in the celebrated Armenian monastery of St. James. He lodged in the monastery of Holy Cross and entered into friendly terms with the deacon Mechitar whom he besought to accompany him to the Holy City. Mechitar, though he had decided to go off to Rome, nevertheless not to cause sorrow to his friend who was of an open and meek disposition, promised to go with him as far as Aleppo, hoping in his heart to persuade him on the journey to come to Rome rather than go to Jerusalem.

They departed together with a caravan bound for Aleppo and on the way frequently discussed theological questions. Mechitar expounded the truths of faith with great clearness, based them on quotations from Holy Scripture and the Armenian Fathers and concluded thus: Whosoever separates himself from the faith of the Church of Rome, separates himself also from the teaching of the Armenian

Fathers¹. Mechitar by his prudence and learning so succeeding in ingratiating himself with the young vardapiet, that the latter did not wish to part company with him; on the contrary, learning of the former's idea of going to Rome 'to the real and pure source of the Christian faith' there to be disciplined in sound doctrine and afterwards return to Armenia to instruct his countrymen, he spontaneously offered to accompany him.

2. Whilst traversing Lesser Armenia they arrived at the river *Karassù*², the Ancient *Melas*, near Melitene³. There being no bridge, they had to cross it on the backs of pack-horses, and the river was very menacing, being swollen by heavy rains. Mechitar, urged on by brotherly love and a holy altruism, lent his companion his own animal which was stronger and more accustomed to fording, while he mounted on that of his friend. The vardapiet then managed to reach the opposite bank in safety. Mechitar's beast on the other hand could not withstand the force of the current. The great strain made the saddle-strap snap, the animal went under and Mechitar, left with the saddle to the sport of the waves, began to whirl about in the eddies of the river. Seeing the danger, a courageous fellow-passenger plunged into the water with his horse, got hold of Mechitar and brought him safe to the shore. Having no change of clothes, our young hero, soaking as he was, continued the journey for three hours until he arrived at the city, where he procured another dress. His donkey remained to him, but he had lost the bag which contained his books — his invaluable and only treasure — which were now lost for ever in the dangerous river. Nevertheless he returned thanks to

1. F. Matthew of Eudoxia. Chap. IX. On these *Armenian Fathers* see Appendix V.

2. *Karassù* in Turkish means *Black Water*.

3. The city of *Melitene* is to-day called by the Turks *Malâtia*.

God who had saved him from certain death, and had preserved his health during those hours of the journey which he had performed in wet clothing.

3. When they arrived at Aleppo, they went to live in the rooms of the Armenian Church¹. Mechitar soon made the acquaintance of several Latin religious: Jesuits, Discalced Carmelites and Capuchins, but he preferred to be with the Jesuits, because among these Fathers, real champions of sanctity and learning, there were some who knew the Turkish language. Here he chose as his counsellor and spiritual guide a certain Father Anthony Beauvossier, a man of great learning and consummate prudence, formerly an apostle in the Indies and various countries of Asia. He therefore knew Turkish well, spoke it to Mechitar and declared himself fortunate in meeting with this chosen vessel of divine wisdom. Mechitar and Hovnan 'made their confession to him and their profession of the Catholic faith'².

During his three month's stay in Aleppo, the Servant of God went morning and evening to Father

1. These 'rooms of the Armenian Church' were a series of chambers attached to the national Church of the Armenians in that city for the benefit of Armenian pilgrims. They were the property of the local church. They were to be met with in Rome, too, until recently, near the churches of St. Blase and St. Mary of Egypt. (Tr.)

2. F. Matthew. Chap. IX. 4. Mechitar made this profession (not abjuration) of faith in the presence of his confessor to show the sincerity of his faith and remove all suspicions, because the Armenians, according to the expression of F. Galano (mentioned above) 'pray all together promiscuously in the same churches, though one does not assent in his heart to what another professes', and so they aroused the suspicions of the Latins. He also writes, though he is far from being partial to the Armenians, 'Nor can it be properly said that the Armenian Church is divided into two sections, one of which is Catholic, the other heretical'. Tome I. Assert. II. § VIII. What he said for his own day was not different from the condition of things in Mechitar's youth. See also Chap XV. of the present work.

Anthony, and never wearied of asking light on the most difficult and necessary questions of theology. The learned son of St. Ignatius was in wonder at the acute observations of Mechitar and at his vast erudition on the Armenian Fathers, and his admiration knew no bounds when he learned that this deacon had not been to any school, nor had he heard any great professor treat of these sublime questions. Hence it was that he did not know what most to admire in Mechitar, his candid soul, his austere and immaculate life and his great love for God, or his quick-sighted intelligence joined to an angelic humility; and so he esteemed this young man as a scholarly doctor and almost fully educated. When, then, Mechitar made known to him his wish to go to Rome to be educated, he judged this journey useless and did his best to persuade him to remain in Armenia, to preach throughout the whole country, and to put aside the idea of a voyage to the West where he would have to accustom himself to practices and customs which would not help him much later on in the East¹. But seeing that Mechitar was firm in his resolve, he acceded to his wishes and consigned to him the following enthusiastic letter of introduction, having it confirmed by the signatures of other religious superiors in Aleppo.

I, the undersigned, a priest of the Society of Jesus, bear witness that Mechitar, an Armenian religious and deacon, son of Peter of Sebaste, a member of the Catholic faith, which from boyhood he has possessed and by the reading of old Catholic Armenian books he has learnt, though never publicly professed, since in his own country he never found a Missionary for the purpose, at length in our oratory made his profession of faith in my presence, according

1. F. Matthew relates that Mechitar's right eye was still troubling him. Once while kissing F. Anthony's hand, he placed it on his eye with great faith. From that day he felt no more pain in it and the eye was shortly cured by itself.

to the decrees of the Holy Congregation of Propaganda. Since this excellent young man is burning with the greatest zeal for the propagation of the Catholic faith and the union of his Church with that of Rome, and since he appears to me to be well-fitted for the undertaking both from his innocence of life, singular piety, open character and his acquaintance with the works of the holy Armenian Fathers, extracts from whose writings he has at his finger-ends to confound heretics, I could not but approve of the plan which he has for a long time entertained, of going to Rome that there, in the very citadel of the Catholic religion, he might be provided with sound doctrine and sincere virtue against heretical malice, and thus armed, to return home and satisfy his zeal for the conversion of Armenians. I therefore most earnestly beseech all those who will read this letter that, seconding his pious desire, they not only receive him kindly as a brother, but that they help him to realise his project for the glory of God and the exaltation of the Holy Roman Church. In witness thereof, I forward this letter signed with my own hand and stamped with the seal of our Society. Other Superiors in Syria have also signed as witnesses. 30th May, 1695.

Anthony Beauvillier. S. J.

John Verzeau, S. J. Superior of the Jesuit Missions in Syria.

Brother Joseph of Argevène, Guardian, though unworthy of the Oriental Missions of the Capuchins in the Province of Turon.

Brother Ferdinand of St. Liduvina, Vicar Provincial of the Missions of the Discalced Carmelites in Syria and Palestine.

(L. S.)

4. Had Mechitar gone to Rome, and with this splendid testimony presented himself to the Jesuits he would have undoubtedly received the welcome of a son. But God, who had predestined him for other ends, did not permit him to accomplish then his flight to the West.

Mechitar remained in Aleppo three months, leading a life of great penances and scourgings, and incessantly praying or meditating. Then he received the blessing of F. Anthony who was moved even to tears at parting, and with Hovnan he went

down to Alexandretta in Syria, where, finding a French ship bound for Italy, they went on board. There chanced to embark, too, the Armenian Catholicos of Sis (Cilicia), Gregory Bizag by name, who was on the way to Rome with another bishop¹.

The ship, on its arrival at Cyprus, had to stop for some time, for the captain had been informed that English frigates were scouring those waters, and since there was a rupture between the two kingdoms, English and French, he deemed it prudent to wait and not continue the voyage. The passengers preferred to disembark at a fortress called Duzla. There the catholicos used all the means in his power to persuade Hovnan to allow himself be consecrated bishop and the deacon Mechitar be ordained priest, that he might make a solemn entry into Rome with two bishops and a priest. Mechitar absolutely spurned the proposal, but Hovnan finally acceded to the request and in the Armenian monastery of St. Macarius he was consecrated.

Meanwhile the time of suspense had passed, and the captain of the French ship ordered the passengers to embark. During this delay Mechitar, by reason of his abstinences and some bad water he had drunk, had contracted a fiery malarian fever. The captain, seeing him in such a state, was afraid of infection and refused to admit him on board. Mechitar wept and prayed the captain to be allowed to embark, as also did Hovnak, who did not want to be separated from his sick friend. The captain hesitated at first, but at length, gained over by an influential merchant, he yielded, and Mechitar entered the ship. But his illness got worse, and Mechitar himself, losing all hope of being able to perform a sea-journey of several months, and uniting himself to the will of God, Whom he believed to have other designs in his regard, asked the captain to let him

1. Concerning these patriarchs or catholicos of Sis, who in their jurisdiction did not depend on Etchmiadzin, more will be said in succeeding chapters.

down at the first port. Here an Armenian merchant was to leave who had come on board to settle some business and had his boat attached to the ship. The charitable merchant eagerly offered his services, and brought our young friend to the shore of the island of Salamis, called also Constantia, because it was restored by the Emperor Constantine. The separation was heart-rending for Bishop Hovnan. He insisted on being allowed to disembark with Mechitar, but was obliged to remain on board, the Catholicos having menaced him with the refusal to grant the decree of episcopal consecration.

5. Mechitar, on getting to land, hired a horse, rode to the city of Salamis and went for shelter to a room of the Armenian church, where he remained three days without any help and without anyone coming to see him. On the fourth day a churchwarden found him in a deplorable condition and brought him on horseback to the hermitage of St. Macarius, a day's journey distant from the city. He laid him down inside the monastery gates, and calling the monks, said, 'This person is a deacon and a monk; it is for monks to look after him'.

These hermits were of strict observance. Mechitar had already been here on the occasion of Hovnan's consecration and had had heated discussions with the monks when defending the Council of Chalcedon and Pope St. Leo against their blasphemies. Seeing him again they therefore renewed their former hatred of him. They brought him, though very unwell, to a half - delapidated cell which had no shelter from the wind or rain. They gave him neither bed nor coverlet, and the Servant of God, folding his wollen cloak, used one half of it as a mattress, the other as a bed - cover. They brought neither food nor drink to his room, and when the raging fever deprived him of consciousness to such an extent that he forgot to drag himself to the refectory, he remained for a long time deprived of nourishment, until, relieved in some way, he succeeded in crawling to the door of the kitchen to buy a piece of bread or a biscuit and some olives.

This kind of life lasted two months. He not only bore up against it with resignation, but transported by the cry of the Saints, 'To suffer or to die; to suffer always, and always for Thee, O Lord!' he felt a real joy in his tribulations and gave thanks to the Most High, placing himself in the hands of Him Who is the master of our life. Often in those moments when the fever was burning him completely, he would lose consciousness, trail himself to the garden and throw himself into a tank of cold water which spouted from an adjacent cavern. At the touch of the cold he would regain consciousness, come out of the water and in this damp condition remain for hours with no one to help him. Then he would return on all fours as best he could, invoking all the Saints, 'beginning from St. Peter and the other Apostles', says F. Matthew. He was often molested too by serpents which were very numerous on the island, and yet, though in such abandonment, provoked by so many insults, never did a lament or an unchristian reply pass his lips, never did a shadow of offended pride or resentment cross his face. Rather did he show himself always contented, and thanked the Lord from the bottom of his heart, thinking that all this was permitted by Him for the expiation of his sins; and God miraculously preserved the life of His faithful servant whom He had destined for great and holy work.

6. The summer of that year (1695), a host of pilgrims arrived at the hermitage of St. Macarius. Among their number there was a kindly bishop, who, seeing the young deacon in a really pitiable state, approached him, inquired why he was so persecuted and, full of admiration for the patience and goodness of the Servant of God, began to attend him as a servant. On the feast of the Transfiguration, which generally falls on a Sunday of July in Armenia¹,

1. It is an ancient custom in the Armenian Church to transfer the festivals of the Transfiguration, Assumption, the Holy Cross, etc, to the following Sunday. Christmas is an exception. It is always attached to the date.

and is celebrated with great solemnity, he asked the invalid if he would accept a dish, which would remind him of his own country, prepared with butter and flour. He received an affirmative answer and so went personally to the kitchen to cook it. He presented it to Mechitar and that little tit-bit, and especially the paternal assistance and moral support afforded by the bishop, so reanimated him that he asked the bishop to be brought to the city to consult some doctor. The bishop consented and he settled him in a room of the Armenian church. A doctor was called who examined the sick man, found him suffering from depressing jaundice, but observing that he was in a critical condition, refused to assume the responsibility of curing him. Mechitar, not a whit put about, placed himself in God's hands and awaiting the hour when God should call him to Himself, prepared for it by earnest prayer.

Meanwhile several of his compatriots took an interest in him; each one prescribed a remedy and all of them exhorted him to interrupt at least his strict fast and eat a little meat. Mechitar, remembering that his two holy teachers used to say that in case of illness one should eat meat, began to eat it several times a week. This new regime, the fresh air and comfortable lodging very soon wrought a change in him and he felt his strength come back to him.

7. While he was still convalescent, there came the feast of the holy Council of Ephesus⁽¹⁾. Mechitar, who had begun to frequent the choir-services, heard in the hymn which was recited that day in honour of the Council, a stray strophe against the Council of Chalcedon and Leo the Great. He was greatly pained and showed his keen sorrow but kept silent and soon retired to his room. The monks approached him in great numbers and ordered him to repeat the anathema against the Council and the Pope. Mechitar, though still weak and exhausted, roused

1. See Appendix VI.

himself and summoning back all his old energy, fixed on the monks his eyes all aflame with holy zeal and sending out flashes of lightning, and cried out with a loud voice, 'I anathematize Dioscorus, whom you have to-day honoured with the epithet of "Saint,". Now do what pleases you. Behold me ready to suffer anything for my faith'. Thereupon they all retired in great confusion.

8. Mechitar perceived that permanent recovery was impossible in those surroundings where his faith was so abhorred. But how could he who possessed nothing continue his journey to the West, to Rome? He was thus compelled to retrace his steps homewards and seek there his return to good health. However, every person had to pay to the government a tax called the *capital-tax* and Mechitar, unprovided with money, could not pay. He was therefore arrested by the tax-gatherers and brought before the superintendent, who, seeing this young man poor, pale, emaciated, helpless and deprived of everything, had pity on him, released him, dispensed him from paying the tax and, as was the custom in the case of the needy, demanded and received from the Armenian community the sum to be paid. But that did not suffice. In order to leave the city a guarantee was required. Where find one? A Greek merchant heard of the case, took pity on Mechitar and presenting himself to the governor of the island, inscribed himself as guarantor. The friendless young man thanked his patron and did not know how to express his feelings of gratitude. On obtaining permission he departed immediately to Duzla and finding a ship about to weigh anchor, embarked for Seleucia. Landing there he started on his journey to Antioch. Through his extreme poverty he was forced to beg his bread by the way-side and walk barefoot over those stony roads, for he had no shoes nor any means of buying a pair. His weariness and his hard life again brought on his fever and illness, and he continued his walk as best he might. Finally he reached Antioch, and then Aleppo, in a state of great prostration, where he found a room near the

Armenian church. The news of his arrival quickly spreading through the city, there hastened to see him his old acquaintances who had kept him in friendly remembrance. They had a doctor called in, made the Servant of God submit to medical treatment and the jaundice soon disappeared. However the germ remained and the malady made its appearance again from time to time, as we shall see in the course of his life. Indeed it was this very illness which, by the providence of God, brought him at length to the grave.

Mechitar did not find Father Anthony Beauvollier at Aleppo this time. Nevertheless he often paid a visit to the other Fathers of the Society of Jesus and profited by their good advice. Like F. Anthony they insisted on his not going to the West but begged him to remain in the East and preach the true faith in his own country. Mechitar placed himself anew in the hands of God and thanking his good friends and the Jesuit Fathers so interested in his welfare, set out for Aintab, and continuing thence his journey, he arrived at Sebaste on the fifteenth of November 1695.

That very day there had reached the ears of his mother and relatives the sad news of his extreme illness, and of his utter abandonment and want of help in the corner of a hermitage. One can well imagine the despair of the mother who now wept for her son as dead. So it was, that when those who had seen him arrive in the caravan hurried to acquaint the sorrowing mother of the news, her heart beat fast with anxious expectation and uncertainty; and on seeing her son again whom she had mourned for as in the grave, she fainted away.

9. The whole city of Sebaste joined with Mechitar's family in their joy. The citizens were by now very proud of the reputation of their young deacon. They all hastened to pay him their respects and wish him an early recovery from his illness, the Servant of God having taken to bed again on account of the reappearance of his malady after his long journey.

The rest, the healthy food and the care of his mother soon brought him back to good health and he was able to retire again to the monastery of Holy Cross. There he recommenced his apostolate and his austere living, giving himself up to contemplation and sacred studies, all in order to instruct his fellow-countrymen in the teaching of the Church of Rome, which was the only true doctrine, as he proved with abundant from quotations the Armenian Fathers. This sacred learning of his, his masterly yet clear explanation of the necessity of being in conformity with the teaching of the Roman Church, aroused the anger and aversion of some of the monks, particularly of a certain Zaruk who began to persecute him, injure him and deride him openly. One day, while the Servant of God was absent on an errand to the city, this monk Zaruk went so far as to shatter the door of Mechitar's cell and snatching up all his books and writings, among which were many *praises* in honour of our Lady and the Saints, he consigned them to the flames. When the Servant of God returned from the city he could not find his books, and while he was looking for them, Zaruk himself came upon the scene and ludicrously boasted of having thrown them all into the fire. Mechitar in presence of such arrogance remembered the patriarch Job, said never a word, entered his room, thanked God for having wished to try him and humiliate him thus, and, as if nothing had happened, continued to wish well to all, especially to Zaruk.

10. During that winter (1695-96) he suffered exceedingly from a severe cold, often expectorated blood and a general weakness got hold of him. His admirers in the city and the magnates of the district wished to see him a priest at all cost, but he, deeming himself unworthy of so exalted a ministry, answered that his irremediably diminished strength rendered that impossible. When the return of spring raised everyone's hopes in the return of his strength, the people insisted with the bishop and with Mechitar, who, after praying much, bowed his

head to the will of God with the hope of serving him better in the sacred ministry. After many days of retreat and prayer he was therefore ordained priest by Bishop Carapet, superior of the monastery of Holy Cross. That was a day of great solemnity. There was a great of concourse of people, who believed they saw in their venerated fellow-citizen, now a priest, their future vardapiet and bishop. Along with Mechitar there was also ordained that monk Zaruk towards whom the Servant of God had always shown an evangelical charity. From the day of his ordination Mechitar began to call himself Mechitar *Abegha*, as is the custom in Armenia to call priests who are monks but not yet vardapiets⁽¹⁾.

1. Mechitar was then twenty years old. It must be remarked, as was observed, in the 1st Process, that, according to the discipline then in force, secular priests who were married could not be ordained until their thirtieth year, whilst monks, having already taken the vow of chastity, had the privilege of being ordained at twenty or even earlier.



CHAPTER IV.

Mechitar works at founding a Congregation.

1. The necessity of preparing many preachers of the true faith. — 2. The first disciples of Mechitar: John and Joseph. — 3. John's parents against Mechitar. — 4. Mechitar goes to see Khatchatur vardapiet in Constantinople. — Proposes to him to be the head of a Congregation of preachers. — 5. Mechitar preaches at Constantinople. — Sets out for Olti in search of disciples. — 6. Stormy sea makes him land at Sinope. — Goes to preach at Samsun, Marzavan and Amassia. — 7. Departs for Erzerum. — Establishes himself in the monastery of Carmir Vank. — 8. Apostolic zeal. — 9. Pestilence in the monastery. — His abnegation in the service of the stricken. — He is infected himself and is cured.

1. From the happy day of his ordination the Servant of God felt within himself all the sublimity of the grace granted him by the Lord. In his soul there re-echoed the words of the Prophet Isaias, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me; he hath sent me to preach to the meek, to heal the contrite of heart'. LXI. I. There always remained vividly impressed in his mind the mystic vision of his two holy teachers, who had seen Mechitar clear the way that led to the temple, a symbol of the unity of the Catholic Church. To his heart rather than to his ear there returned with their sweet melody the burning words of the saintly Jesuit missionary, which had spurred

him on to gird himself at once to the work of rooting out from his country the tare of schism.

During his many wanderings through divers towns and monasteries he had become aware of the fact that in many of the people the schism was the result of ignorance. It was therefore necessary to preach and so dissipate the darkness of error, to make known and prove the truths of our holy faith. But how could he accomplish alone such a gigantic task? He then saw the necessity of many minds, and hearts uniting themselves in the holy enterprise, and of the continuance of efficacy in the work once begun; to be precise, a society, a religious community had to be formed. His daily sermons, the fame of his virtue, his penances, his immaculate life which spread around him the charming odour of angelic purity and charity, had attracted listeners and admirers from Sebaste and the neighbouring districts, and among these were two pious young men, John and Joseph who declared themselves willing to follow his example and to join him inseparably.

Mechitar saw here the hand of the Lord, and in the silence of his prayers and meditations, submissively kissed that Hand and thanked God fervently and humbly. He recommended to the young men prayer and spiritual reading. By an unexpected stroke of good fortune there fell into his hands the golden book of the *Imitation of Christ*, translated into Armenian. He never tired of reading it morning and evening, and that his two new associates might profit by it too, he cut the book in two, and shared it with them.

In a short space of time, John, inspired by the reading of the book, became quite aflame with love for divine things. Of a wealthy family, he learned in his meditations of the vanity of the world and the sublime reality of the love of Jesus and of eternal bliss. He felt an utter contempt for all earthly things and proposed to withdraw his promise of marriage, take a vow of chastity and follow in everything the monk and priest Mechitar, his fellow-citizen. He revealed his projects to the Servant

of God, who, though very pleased, recommended him to be prudent, not to speak to others on the subject, nor to change his clothing nor his customs until he had received — a most difficult thing — the consent of his parents. But the new recruit of grace could not restrain his ardour; he changed his rich garments for a poor garb, gave up all — even innocent — entertainments, and devoted himself wholly to prayer and works of charity.

3. All this sorely grieved John's parents, who 'ignorant of the sanctity of the angelic life of a religious, and observing the unprincipled character of the religious of their time, believed that such a life was in store for their son, should he become a monk¹'. His mother turned everything upside down in the house, weeping and wailing all day long, and so Mechitar became the object of hatred on the part of the members of this family, who looked on him as the seducer of their son, and began to persecute him in every way. Mechitar quite calmly brought their beloved to them and said, 'Here he is, take him and dissuade him from his purpose'. What is more, in order to moderate the excitement and the confusion created in the city by the young man's parents, he decided to withdraw for a time and go to preach in the city of Eudocia. If in his absence John were to remain firm in his vocation, his parents could no longer accuse Mechitar. He therefore accosted John, communicated to him his intentions and recommended him to Jesus and His most holy Mother.

When Mechitar was out of the way, many friends of John's family, 'ecclesiastical and secular', used all their powers of persuasion to make him desist from his undertaking. 'For what reason, beloved son', said they, 'have you taken such a whim into your head. Your parents have espoused you to a handsome young lady and at present everyone is

(1) F. Matthew. Chap XI.

busy making preparations for the marriage, and you will not listen to them, obstinate as you are in the idea of becoming a monk and leading a wandering life. Do you not see the monks of our day? How abject they are? What a most miserable life they lead? Are they not vagabonds and beggars, shunned and insulted by everyone? You are thinking of leaving the ease of your own home for a savage roaming life full of misery!' (1) With these arts and this kind of talk, they believed they would prevail over John, who did not answer a word to their fine speeches. On the contrary, to free himself from their incessant boring, he fled to the province of Aghin confiding the secret solely to his companion Joseph, and there he lived unknown, performing works of piety and begging his food from charitable persons.

At his disappearance the anger and anguish of his parents were indescribable. They sent to look for him everywhere, and not finding him, they determined to call Mechitar before the tribunals as instigator of the flight of their dearly-beloved son. This campaign of persecution against the Servant of God was set on foot by the same Zaruk as had burnt his books, that Zaruk who saw in Mechitar's life the condemnation of his own worldly living. Another vardapiet and a bishop had joined his conspiracy and all three swore to have him put in prison, when Zaruk miserably lost his life. The trio had arranged a festive rendez-vous outside the city. Shortly after it Zaruk went to take a hot bath in one of those springs in which the country abounds, but losing his senses and having no help at hand, he was drowned. His companions carried his body to the monastery, buried it secretly in the garden and kept silent, always fearing they would be questioned and arrested for his death and secret burial.

(1) F. Matthew. Chap. XI.

Meanwhile Mechitar's friends acquainted him by letter of the confusion which reigned on account of the fugitive, and of the painful consequences that might follow therefrom. The Servant of God judged it necessary to return to Sebaste, and learning from Joseph the whereabouts of his brother's hiding-place, went to see him and brought him to his parents. They experienced at the sight of him an un hoped-for and immense joy. But Providence was looking over them and It had already arranged that in the future with their consent John should leave them to follow Mechitar in his holy enterprise.

4. Mechitar in his missions to Eudocia and Aghin had often heard extolled the wisdom and prudence of the vardapiet Khatchatur⁽¹⁾, native of Erzerum, Doctor of Theology of the Propaganda College, Rome, later on an apostolic missionary in the Levant and then at Constantinople. The Servant of God, faithful to his profound sentiment of humility, was on the look-out for some one who would be a fitting leader in the great work he was now contemplating, viz, to prepare missionaries capable of enlightening the Armenians in the true faith, and for this purpose he made up his mind to go to Constantinople and ask the theologian Khatchatur to be their head. He made known this design to his faithful companion John. 'The Vardapiet Khatchatur will be the author and the leader of the work. I will only be the co-operator'.⁽²⁾ He advised John to remain with his parents, in order not to resuscitate former troubles, assuring him that he would inform him about everything from Constantinople and that only then would they decide, with God's help, what was to be done. He departed immediately and after a toilsome journey arrived at the capital of the Orient in the spring of 1697.

(1) He often signed his name Cacciaturus, latinizing it as was the custom of the period. Khatchatur in Armenian means 'gift of the Cross'.

(2) F. Matthew. Chap. XI.

He immediately made the acquaintance of Khatchatur, often went to visit him and soon there grew up between them a mutual esteem and affection. The Servant of God disclosed his humble aspirations and entreated him to put himself at the head of such a salutary work. But Khatchatur begged to be excused and resolutely refused to preside over such an undertaking, there being an absolute want of material aid. Educated at Rome, acquainted with monastic and religious Orders, he well knew what expenses were necessary to found and maintain a Congregation, and this he set before Mechitar who possessed nothing to initiate a work of such proportions. Mechitar was down-hearted at the refusal but he did not despair. Meanwhile his companion John had arrived at Constantinople, after obtaining at length his parents' consent. This was a real consolation for the Servant of God who remained at Constantinople five months, never giving up hopes of persuading Khatchatur, but in vain.

5. Since his arrival he had rented a poor room, and he frequented the Latin church which the Jesuits possessed at Galata, where he celebrated Holy Mass. Soon the secret fire, which had been consuming him for some time, of doing some good to his countrymen, urged him on to preach the true religion and penance, and many abandoned the schismatical doctrines and joined themselves with those who professed the tenets of the Church of Rome. As it became noised abroad among all the Armenians of Constantinople that a learned and eloquent preacher had arrived in the capital, the priests and the notables of the Armenian population betook themselves to his poor dwelling, and invited him to come and preach in the greater Armenian church, dedicated to St. Gregory the Illuminator, in Galata, then the centre of the capital, offering him lodging in the adjacent hospice. Mechitar, not from vainglory but seeking only the spiritual welfare of his own people accepted the invitation and repaired to the church of St. Gregory. Comforted and inspired by

the Holy Ghost he preached every day on the true religion, on penance, on Christian charity with a fascinating eloquence and a voice at once sonorous and sweet, supporting his every statement with copious quotations from Holy Scripture and the Fathers.

The spacious church was too small for the crowd which flocked thither every day and returned to their various occupations edified and wondering. The Servant of God was then in his 21st year and scarcely any hair as yet adorned his youthful cheeks. Higher than the average in stature, his body well built — neither plumpy nor lean, his face meek and open, an aquiline nose, expressive eyes, his deportment nobile and grave, his voice clear and powerful — this is a picture of the young apostle who convinces, persuades and fascinates with his speech. The few who knew him intimately, speak of his singular modesty, his austere and pious life wholly given up to meditation and spiritual reading. He took no recompense — quite a new thing to this people. Many therefore were encouraged to go and see him in his cell and ask counsel on the life of perfection. Among these was a young man named John, afterwards Father Emmanuel, who struck to the heart by the sermons of the Servant of God left his betrothed and followed him.

Of this holy zeal of his at Constantinople Father Verzeau, Superior of the Jesuits and his former acquaintance at Aleppo, bears witness. The latter was only too pleased to renew the expression of his high esteem for Mechitar and left him a letter of recommendation which would have been of great service to the young priest, had he gone to Rome.

I, the undersigned, hereby testify that in this city whither the affairs of our missions have called me, I found Mekitar son of Peter of Sebaste, an Armenian religious and now a priest, and to my great joy heard him preach, and for myself have seen that this excellent young man is imbued with the same desire of propagating the true faith as two years ago at Aleppo I knew and in an authentic

document testified him to be. Therefore by the charity of Christ I pray all Catholics and especially all Missionaries of whatever Order to cherish and help his holy plan and further it by all means in their power. In witness thereof I consign to him this letter signed by me and with the seal of our Society.

Constantinople, 15th July 1697.

John Verzeau, Superior-General of the Jesuit missions in Syria.

(L. S.)

6. Mechitar remained at Constantinople until the month of September. Since he could not persuade Khatchatur, he felt in his soul a divine encouragement to begin the work alone for the glory of God, surrendering all into His hands and expecting all help from Him Alone. The Ottoman capital was not a propitious locality for gathering disciples, so the Servant of God thought of going off to Olti on the confines of Georgia, in the province of Erzerum, where he knew a priest of Catholic sentiments from whom he hoped for co-operation. There still remained to be got the money to pay his passage, for he had nothing himself, having offered his services gratuitously in the exercise of the apostolic ministry. He therefore began to take the alms proffered him by the bakers to whom he went in turns in the evenings to preach and catechise in the bakehouses. He took what sufficed for the journey and was enabled to buy two books very dear to him and in themselves very precious: the Bible and the Imitation of Christ. Then recommending himself and his disciples to our Blessed Lord and the Blessed Virgin, having said a last farewell to his friends and the rest of the faithful, he departed with his disciples in the direction of Trebizond, the nearest port to Olti.

Terrible storms on the Black Sea endangered several times his own life and the safety of the ship. Arriving after indescribable hardships at Heraclea, all on board were forced to disembark. When the waters grew calm again, Mechitar thought it well to continue the journey but keeping close to

the shore. The weather began to threaten again and the tempest roared again over the sea. However after two days of dangers and hardships they finally reached Sinope. During all that space of time the Servant of God and his companions did nothing but pray to the Lord to withhold the furious waves of the sea, and this prayer infused courage into the hearts of the rowers who showed that they had the greatest confidence in Mechitar. There being no ship at Sinope ready to set sail for Trebizond, they continued in a small boat to Samsun.

In those days there was not a numerous Armenian colony at Samsun, so the Servant of God directed his steps towards Marzavan and Amassia, centres of the Armenian population. Marzavan extended a hearty welcome to Mechitar and he preached there, arousing great enthusiasm among the priests and the people. They asked him to remain the winter with them and Mechitar willingly consented, continuing his preaching in the city and in the monastery, whose superior was an old acquaintance of his. His zealous sermons on the truths of our holy faith and on penance were powerfully seconded by the sanctity of his life and the shining example he gave of the noblest virtues. The clergy and laity too of Amassia eagerly invited him to come and preach in their city. He meekly obeyed. There also everyone wondered at his teaching, which was all the more effective because accompanied by a simple and holy life. He even succeeded in gaining a disciple in the person of Don Jacob, one of the priests of the place, who later on was a renowned champion of the Catholic faith and of the practice of a Christian life.

7. The people of Amassia did all they could to keep him as their pastor, but Mechitar, who both in thought and action followed with docility the guidance of God, on the appearance of spring, went off to Eudocia and thence to Erzerum, without calling in at Sebaste, lest he should be detained by his loving mother and his dear relations. All along the way he left behind him a salutary souvenir to

the faithful souls he met, by his simple, austere life, passed in prayer, meditation, penance, missionwork and sacrifice, and by his powerful and persuasive preaching against heresy and schism. At Erzerum he was the guest of his friend Paul, who had been on a pilgrimage to Rome and who welcomed him with great joy.

Mechitar intended to go to Olti to his old acquaintance the parish-priest, hoping to find there numerous aspirants for his work. But at Erzerum



Red Monastery.

he received unpleasant information about that priest, and so, hearing on the other hand of the learning and sanctity of the bishop-superior of the monastery called Carmir Vank (Red Monastery) he made up his mind to retire there in the meantime. But fearing that the arrival of a simple priest with two disciples should create a stir in the monastery, he sent John of Constantinople to the monastery of St. Gregory the Illuminator at Madurk, whilst he, with John of Sebaste, hastened to Carmir Vank, fifteen miles distant from Erzerum.

8. The Abbot was Bishop Macarius, a man of sound doctrine, very kindly and meek. He had three priests and fifteen clerics in the abbey. He received Mechitar with open arms, for he had heard of his great reputation, and, personally knowing his wisdom and holiness of life, entrusted to him the education of the young clerics. Mechitar gave himself up to the work with all the ardour of his soul and at the same time found leisure to compile a precious book — a kind of *vade-mecum* for preachers, where they would have at hand timely quotations from Holy Scripture and the Fathers. He explained the Gospel to the young Levites, (amongst them he had placed John) and the theology of Blessed Albert the Great, he preached Catholic truth, insisting on those points in which his contemporaries in Armenia differed from Catholics, and he always closed his lectures with a few burning words on the practice of a Christian life and on penance. On one occasion a certain bishop, named Gregory, of an irascible nature, happened to be in the monastery, and he began to dispute the doctrines of the Servant of God. Mechitar quoted so many texts from Scripture and the Fathers in support of his point that the bishop was compelled to be silent. For this very reason, he was seized with a fit of anger and threw himself on Mechitar, tearing the latter's cheeks with his nails, nor did he stop when he saw the blood flow. Mechitar said nothing, did nothing, but kept quiet and only smiled. The prelate, who could not be beaten by the arguments or numerous quotations of the Servant of God, was overcome by his exemplary goodness and humility. He even became his lifelong friend and admirer, and when, at a later date, Mechitar was abbot at Venice, Bishop Gregory travelled west and presented him with a large painting representing St. Gregory the Illuminator converting the Armenian people. It was an illusion to his own name and to the great services rendered by the Ser-



St. Gregory the Illuminator converting the
Armenian people.

vant of God to his country, by bringing it back to the true faith like the Holy Illuminator⁽¹⁾.

9. Towards the beginning of spring of the year 1698, a pestilence broke out through the whole of Asia Minor. At Carmir Vank almost all the priests and clerics were stricken, and some died. The disease made itself known by nauseous symptoms, brought in its train terrible results, and above all was most contagious. The whole monastery became desolate; no one was on his feet; all were smitten except the Servant of God, who, defying all perils, became all to all men, ran from one cell to another to serve, help and comfort by a kind word or an occasional service, and administered the last Sacraments to those dangerously ill. He laved the ulcers and wounds, bandaged the sores, changed the beds, did the most menial work and carried the dead on his own shoulders to burial. All admired his holy abnegation, which he accompanied with a heavenly smile, while he redoubled his energy in work and sacrifice, thinking all the time that he had only done his duty to his Lord. The plague lasted a long time and when the last invalid was cured, the Servant of God fell ill with a high fever and excruciating pains in the head. Believing this to be due to an excess of blood, he went to the city where a barber opened a frontal vein. But such a hemorrhage issued from the vein and the nostrils, that at the end he seemed almost bloodless. God however preserved him from death. When the danger had passed, a doctor brought him to his house and administered a strong cathartic to him. Mechitar already far gone, was reduced to extremities by this new medicine, and all hope of saving him vanished. The doctor had him brought to a public hospice lest he should die in his (the doctor's) house, and he himself be heavily fined, and his family be contaminated with

(1) The bishop had St. Gregory painted in this picture to his own likeness.

the disease. There he was lovingly yet anxiously assisted by his inseparable companion, John. When the the sad news reached Erzerum, his friend Paul (a rather rich man was he) sent word to spare no expense to save Mechitar's life. But this time again it was God Who saved him without human means. The Servant of God, while in that deplorable state of extreme weakness, wore a continual smile and on his lips there was an incessant ripple of prayer to the Lord. Recovering in a short time from all suffering, he thanked everyone, especially Paul who had been so solicitous for his welfare, and retired again to Carmir Vank.

CHAPTER V.

Mechitar receives the degree of Doctor.
He gathers disciples.

1. Mechitar receives the Doctor's staff from Bishop Marcar.
— 2. He begs the bishop to preside over his work, but without success. — 3. He departs for Erzerum.
— 4. His apostolate. Testimonies from Superiors of the Latin missions. — 5. Is persecuted by Bishop Avetic. — 6. Goes to Constantinople. Agitation in the Turkish capital against the Catholics. Mechitar succeeds in pacifying them. — 7. He gathers disciples round him. — 8. He begins to publish spiritual and theological books. — 9. Common life led by him and his disciples according to monastic rules. — 10. Fierce persecution of the Catholics and Mechitar by the schismatics.

1. When Mechitar returned to the monastery after his severe illness, he did not look for the rest his shaken health demanded, but with that fervour that had become a second nature to him, he gave himself up immediately to the task of instructing the clerics and teaching catechism to the public.

Formerly he was admired but now he had become for all a grand example of the highest virtues and so the cry to make him a doctor (of theology) was raised by all. The good Bishop Marcar, who from the beginning had been wishing to confer this degree on him, called the Servant of God apart, and, knowing his humility, imposed on him the obligation of receiving the doctor's staff, and being

blessed a *cartapiet*, which in the Armenian ecclesiastical hierarchy is a notable degree, conferring as it does on him who receives it, various pastoral prerogatives. Mechitar never wished to receive it, but, that he might preach with more authority and keep disciples around him, he bowed before the will of the Lord and the urgent entreaties of the bishop – superior of the monastery, and with great solemnity received the doctor's degree along with two other monks.

It was the custom for one of the new doctors to preach after the ceremony, so the other two begged Mechitar to take upon himself the imposed task. Moved by the same spirit, he preached extempore such a touching sermon that all were struck with wonder at his learning and the luminous path of penance which he pointed out to the faithful. For several days it was the sole topic of conversation.

Afterwards in obedience to the wishes of Bishop Marcar he made a tour of the province dependent on Carmir Vank and preached wherever he went. John of Sebaste accompanied him everywehre. This young man was also ordained priest by the bishop, who found him fully instructed. In every place the new doctor was welcomed with great enthusiasm and the whole population profited spiritually by his visit.

2. Bishop Marcar, a kind – hearted and humble man free from the spirit of envy, wholly given to the welfare of the flock committed to his care, had on several occasions expressed to Mechitar his feelings of gratitude and was seeking out the best way of rendering some great service to his esteemed guest. Mechitar then took courage and made known to his host the hidden desire of his heart and the end of his visit to those parts, viz, to gather together disciples to form a Congregation, whose members would by preaching enlighten their country in the true Catholic faith, from which it was every day drifting further away, by reason of the ignorance and malice of certain of its leaders. He besought Bishop Marcar, who was of the same Catholic senti-

ments, to aid him in this holy enterprise and put himself at the head of the work, in which Mechitar would be but the humble co-operator and would labour in the preparation of disciples. But the bishop, however well gifted otherwise, lacked energy. Timid by nature, he foresaw with certainty contradictions and persecutions. He loved peace (perhaps, too, the government of the monastery, which he did not want to lose) and so he highly praised the idea but refused to take part in it.

Mechitar did not lose courage at the bishop's refusal, no more than at the refusal of Khatchatur. He merely retired to his cell, threw himself prostrate before a picture of the Blessed Virgin, poured out fervent prayers to her, offered himself anew to her, and felt himself reanimated at the thought that he was to hope for no help but from God, and so commence his work in His name. He saw that it was useless to remain longer in that district, so he made up his mind to return to Constantinople with his pupils, whose number had by now increased, and there, in that great centre of human activity, unknown and unsuspected, having to work too for a living, finally arrive at the long-wished-for goal — the greater glory of God and the spiritual betterment of his nation.

3. Without wasting time he wrote to John to set off for Constantinople, and took with him Father John of Sebaste. His other two new disciples, who were full of fervour and well informed in Catholic doctrine, and would not hear of a separation from him — one was called F. Gabriel, a zealous and prudent missionary, the other F. Lazarus, an eager and obedient collaborator in administration — he sent first to their families, bidding them afterwards meet him in the great capital. Mechitar, after affectionate acknowledgments and greetings to Bishop Marcar, left with F. John for Erzerum, the capital of Armenia, a city now well known to him.

4. He took up his abode in the 'rooms of the church', and preached every day before an immense crowd who came to hear the word of truth which,

with great erudition from the holy Armenian Fathers, he openly and constantly declared to all. Concerning this mission of his and the great fruit therein obtained, we have the testimony of Father Leau, of the Society of Jesus, and Dr. Khatchatur who passed through Erzerum on a mission as apostolic nuncio from Pope Innocent XII to His Beatitude Nahabiet, Catholicos of all the Armenians, then residing in the monastery of Etchmiadzin. He brought from the Pontiff an autograph letter and various presents among which was an extremely rich chair, inlaid with precious stones. This *vardapiet* was on the way back to Constantinople when he stopped for a while in his native city, Erzerum. Here is the commendatory letter of these two priests:

I, the undersigned, a priest of the Society of Jesus, testify that Mekitar Vartabiet, an Armenian doctor (of theology), son of Peter of Sebaste, (with whom I have spoken while passing through this city and whom I know to be of a very good character, of no mean intellectual capacity, and singularly well instructed) this Mechitar, I testify to have embraced the true doctrine of the Catholic Church long ago, as the letters which he received from the fathers of our Society show, and to have professed and taught openly, constantly and with great learning this same teaching, and preached it often amongst his own people. He is very intimate with the works of the holy Armenian Fathers and full of the greatest zeal for the propagation of the faith. I therefore pray and beseech in the Lord all Catholics but especially the reverend religious of whatsoever Order to receive him kindly, look on him as a very learned priest and further his holy desires by all means in their power. In testimony of this I forward this letter signed by my own hand and stamped with our seal.

At Erzerum, in Greater Armenia, 24th Aug. 1699.

(L. S.) Cornelius Leau, S. J.

I also, Arachiel Khatchatur, Nuncio of the Apostolic See to the Armenian Nation, confirm

(L. S.) all written above.

Mechitar, when preaching the word of God, had the tone of full conviction and a sincerity beyond

all proof; he expounded the truth without any evasions, condemned error with a loud voice. The true catholics were thus strengthened in the faith, and the faltering, overcome by his clear exposition of facts, were convinced and remained steadfast in the truth. He combated with particular vehemence those errors which originated in the ignorance of the people or the malice of some evil - disposed leader, and which had gradually crept like a slow - working poison not so much amongst the people as amongst the clergy, such as monophysism¹, the disuse of Extreme Unction and the denial of the divinely - constituted supremacy of the Roman Pontiff. His energetic opposition to errors whose roots were ancient, shook many, and a great number returned to the bosom of the true Church, as is attested by the following commendatory letter from divers eminent missionaries on their way through Erzerum:

We, the undersigned, certify that while passing through Erzerum, a city of Greater Armenia, to our great consolation and edification we met the most erudite Mr. Mechitar, son of Peter of Sebaste, a Catholic priest, who not only has professed, as documents testify, the Roman faith and religiously and constantly preserved it, but with singular zeal and ardour has propagated it and still studies to spread it amongst his countrymen; and with praiseworthy success has brought back many to the bosom of our true Mother. By his remarkable piety, learning and zeal he raises great hopes in the hearts of all, of inflicting no slight wound on the Armenian heresy. Therefore when he asked letters of recommendation from all of us Catholics, we acquiesced with his holy wishes, and presented him with this letter signed willingly by us all, in which we earnestly beg all Catholics and especially those who can promote our holy faith, continually to help this apostolic man with their counsel and aid.

Erzerum, 9th March, 1700.

Bro. Cherub of the Ascension, Discalced Carmelite.
Bro. Joseph Mary of Perugia, Capuchin Missionary.

1. See Appendix VI.

F. William Weber, S. J. Missionary of Malabar.

F. William Mayr, S. J. Missionary of Malabar¹

These missionaries were very willing to leave this testimony, for they knew of his wish to travel to the West, where, when the occasion arose, it would be well appreciated. The efficacious words of the Servant of God were seconded, in confirmation of their truth, by the example of his humble, meek, stainless life, free from worldly interests, rich with the *charismata* of that grace which comforted him in his holy ministry. Every day the people would bring his frugal repast to his cell and he, taking what was strictly necessary, would distribute the rest to the poor.

In this way he remained at Erzerum the whole summer. The priests and people left no stone unturned to have him with them always in Erzerum, and, since he was already *cardapiet*, they spoke of having him as their bishop, for they were displeased with the bishop they had; but Mechitar, who had other plans in his mind, would not listen to such proposals. The affection, however, of the people for Mechitar, and this intention of theirs aroused the envy and irritation of the bishop of the place, the infamous Avetic whom we have already spoken of, and whose misbehaviour and final repentance we shall have occasion to record. This prelate, hopelessly ignorant of Holy Scripture and the Fathers, of an ambitious and turbulent character, when he heard that Dr. Mechitar was preaching with unanswerable quotations and convincing arguments, two natures in Christ and the divinely – constituted supremacy of the Roman Pontiff over the other patriarchs, and

(1) The original of this document, as also that of all other documents quoted, are preserved in the Archives of the Mechitarian Congregation at Venice. A great number of these writings are now being printed under the title: '*Documents for the Cause of the Beatification of the Servant of God, Abbot Mechitar*'.

that the clergy and the laity fully assented to his teaching, whilst he, their pastor, thought differently, summoned Mechitar to his presence and with angry overbearing addressed him thus: 'How dare you preach such doctrine? Are you not terrified at the thought that I, a bishop, may accuse you before the Turkish tribunals as a *Frank* and a rebel and even torture and kill you'? To such menaces the Servant of God replied, 'I thank heaven in all things. I have not the heart to hurt anyone, much less your sacred person, and this is a great comfort for me. But I fear God and Him alone, and I am prepared for anything in the defence of the truth'. The bishop became dumb before such a wise and intrepid speech, and dismissed him, enjoining on him not to preach again on such matters. But Mechitar, like the Holy Apostles of old, who, in spite of the menaces of the Jews, continued to preach in the name of Jesus Christ, went on teaching those holy truths as long as he was in Erzerum, that is, until spring, when he thought it possible to scale the mountains of ice and snow. Then, bidding farewell to the clergy and to the people, who were in tears, he set out with his disciples for Trebizond, and finding a ship ready there, he embarked for Constantinople which he reached in July, 1700. He was then twenty - five years old.

7. The people of the capital, who had known him as a simple priest and had admired his rich, inspired and convincing language, welcomed him now as a vardapiet, as one of the most learned doctors of his country. He lodged in the hospice of the church of St. Gregory the Illuminator, often preached to crowded audiences and said Mass in the Latin Church, where he administered the Sacraments of Confession and Communion to the faithful who asked for them. However on this visit he found the Armenian population of the capital deeply agitated with internal strife, from the bishop down to the man in the street, and all seemed animated with the same desire, viz, to accuse one another before the Mahometan tribunals.

One evening he was informed that a great number of the inhabitants were going to the Grand - Vizier to accuse as rebels those Armenians who obeyed the Roman Pope and were called *Franks* or *Catholics*, because some of them had imprudently nicknamed certain Armenian priests *Khakham*, a name usually given to Jewish Rabbis, as a sign of contempt. Mechitar knew perfectly well what harm would accrue from such an accusation and he was greatly pained. The following day he ascended the pulpit in the church and spoke with evangelical unction on the peace which should reign in every Christian heart, and of that brotherly love without which one cannot be a Christian.

In the church many of those were present who wished to accuse their own countrymen to the Grand - Vizier. Whilst in church they all listened in silence, but, when they got outside, they made directly for the Sublime Porte. Mechitar, hearing of it, immediately snatched the crucifix from the altar, and with this in his fist, he ran towards the mob, shouting, 'Brothers, what are you doing? If you wish to betray those who are at one with the Church of Rome, here am I! Hand me over to the authorities. For my faith I am ready to die, and I shall follow you to the tribunals with this cross in my hand'. They all swore that they were not incited against him, but against those who had called their priests *Khakham*. Then Mechitar used all his strength and the powerful fascination of his speech to persuade them not to appeal to infidel tribunals when accusing their Christian brethren; and to offer a sop to their self-love, offended by the imprudence of some Catholic or other, he advised them to go to the Patriarch, who after an inquiry could suitably punish those guilty ones who had thrown scornful epithets in the face of their brethren. The excited populace gave way to the eloquence of charity as explained by the Servant of God, and instead of going to the Sublime Porte, hastened to the Patriarch who soon calmed the storm, and everyone went home in peace.

7. Whilst Mechitar was staying in the hospice of St. Gregory the Illuminator, several pious young men offered to be his disciples and to live his life of prayer and penance far from the luxuries of the world. He welcomed those whom he could rely on, instructed them for a time, and then made known his design of forming a society for the glory of God and the good of his country. But in the meantime they must keep quiet about this project and come to him for instruction. Lest the extraordinary number of ecclesiastics joined together there (they were nine all told) should make people guess the existence of a Congregation, which through envy would have been forbidden by the patriarchal authorities, Mechitar arranged to send some of them on a mission. At Constantinople he was joined by F. Elias, doctor of theology, a disciple of F. Minas of Jerusalem, and since one had to be vardapiet in order to be able to preach, he had the doctor's staff given to F. John of Sebaste and F. George whom he found worthy of the honour both in learning and age.

After fervent prayers and opportune instructions on the apostolate, and after a course of spiritual exercises, he sent these three doctors to Armenia to preach the true faith and penance. He also had ordained priest young John of Constantinople, who was then called Emmanuel. Mechitar thus laid the foundations of his holy work and sent his disciples to realize gradually his extensive project. His heart palpitated with a holy joy and he accompanied his missionaries everywhere like a father who remains ever united to his distant sons. As now, so also during his whole life, he lived in unintermitting correspondence with those sons of his wherever they were, he wished to be informed of everything, even of the minutest details concerning the spiritual welfare of souls and hastened to answer all correspondence, particularly when he was asked for counsel. The letters, coming from far - distant shores, testify, as we shall see, to the zeal of these missionaries whose apostolic labours were like refreshing dew

on the arid ground which they abundantly fructified.

8. When the missionaries had gone, the others continued the common life already arranged. By day they came to their master Mechitar and at night they returned home.

Meanwhile the Servant of God, his soul burning with a holy ardour, gave himself up with unwearying energy to prepare and provide every means of printing the more necessary books, particularly those which directly treat of the spiritual life. The first one he had printed was the golden book of the 'Imitation of Christ', then a book of prayers and meditations, probably collected by himself. There followed a commentary on the Gospel of St. John by Dr. Peter of Mezkhita, Georgia, and one on the Canticle of Canticles by Dr. Khatchatur.

This was the beginning of the religious life in his disciples, in whom he wished to see always united the intellectual and the spiritual element, that the knowledge of sacred things might effectually concur in the development of the religious activities and guide aright the mind and heart, which are subject to dangerous oscillations where there is lacking a firm grasp of the matter discussed, and a clear vision of the end to be gained. Mechitar knew personally what evils had been caused by ignorance in his own country.

9. Besides these spiritual and material labours, since he wished to ground his sons in the monastic life of prayer, meditation, obedience and study, he first of all turned to the Lord, the Giver of all good things, that He might guide their every step, purify their intentions and fertilize with His grace their labours which they always directed to His greater glory. He had then the good fortune to rent very cheaply a big house at Pera with a number of rooms suited for monastic purposes, and there he assembled his companions in the April of 1701. In that house, besides books and the requisites for study there, was also the machinery for the binding of books, a trade in which F. Elias of Constantinople had great expe-

rience. Under the direction of F. Mechitar who presided over everything, every day was begun with prayer and office in choir; then all set to study, keeping beside them their printing – tools. If some stranger appeared they would put aside their books and begin the work of printing cards, and on the intruder's departure, they would take up their books again. They took their scanty meal of vegetables in common, saying the prayers prescribed by the ritual and listening in silence to the reading of some spiritual book. In the evening each returned to his own house. Only on Sunday did the Servant of God go to preach in the church of St. Gregory, which had become all too small for the crowd which assembled to hear him speak.

10. It is impossible to imagine the joy experienced by the venerated leader and his disciples during this common life of prayer, work and study, in which they saw the realization of their noblest aspirations and the tranquil formation of their religious community. With the simplicity of holy souls, they believed that every dreaded obstacle was removed, and trustfully awaited the hour, which now seemed near, of being able to live together day and night in monastic discipline under the obedience of their beloved guide, and dedicate their lives entirely to prayer, spiritual exercises and study in that great city. But these were not the designs of the Omnipotent who was leading his faithful servants to higher ends, more profitable for their souls. He therefore permitted terrible persecutions to visit them and, what was worse, the threatened dispersion of their scarcely – formed community. These persecutions arose from the same source as the spirit which animated them, viz, the the diffusion of the Catholic faith, for Mechitar by his clear and forcible preaching on the faith of the Church of Rome, showed that he was really in error who did not join that church. In this way he drew down on himself the implacable hatred and ire of several ecclesiastics, who saw in his community and its intended work an obstacle to their own ambitions, a brake and

check to their lust for filthy lucre. Fierce then was the persecution against Catholics in general and against Mechitar and his companions in particular.

But before entering on this question, a brief survey must be made of the state of the higher Armenian clergy at that time in Constantinople.

CHAPTER VI.

Mechitar founds his Congregation.

1. Persecution of the Catholics by the Patriarch Ephrem. — 2. Mechitar flees for refuge to the Capuchin Friary. — 3. Persecution throughout all Asia Minor. — Abnegation of Peter, Patriarch of the Syrians. — Mechitar recalls his missionaries from Armenia. — 4. He decides to take refuge in the Morea which is under Venetian rule. — 5. He founds his Congregation. — Fervent vow to the Most Holy Virgin. — 6. Transference to the Morea. — 7. The Patriarch Avetic seeks to gain Mechitar over with promises. — 8. Mechitar leaves the Capuchin Friary. — 9. He hides in Smyrna. — 10. He departs for Zante and the Morea in February of 1703.

1. In the preceding chapter we referred to the religious troubles among Armenians in the Turkish capital. They gradually spread to the neighbouring cities and to the provinces where Armenian colonies were to be found. The cause of this persecution was the ambition of some bishops, who, in fifteen months, from July of 1700 to September 1701, occupied in turn the Patriarchal See three times, presenting huge sums of money for this to the Grand-Vizier and the Shek ul-Islam, the head of the Mahometan religion. It would be tedious and troublesome to follow out the harrowing details of these scandalous plots to reach the exalted dignity of Patriarch, which had become the goal of their ambition, and included also the prerogative of being the civil head of the nation¹. We shall merely record

1. See Appendix IV.

briefly what has relation to our subject – matter and is necessary for its proper understanding.

We mentioned elsewhere that the Catholicos or Patriarch of Etchmiadzin, Nahapiet, had been honoured with presents by Pope Innocent XI and had received from the Holy Father a letter recommending to him some Dominican missionaries from Santa Sabina¹. The Catholicos was very pleased and in a letter of exultation had made known his great joy to everyone, adding link the chain which that linked the Armenian and Roman Churches should never be broken.

The Pontiff had sent, too, a copy of the work of F. Clement Galano the Theatine, which contained several accusations against the Armenians in questions of theology, and inquired if they were well – founded. The Catholicos answered that they were false judgments. ‘We’, he wrote, ‘do not accept them; we reject them. We are steadfast in that faith and union which St. Sylvester and St. Gregory the Illuminator professed and consolidated. We confess what they confessed. We are united as they are united, because we acknowledge the Holy Apostle Peter to be the Vicar of Christ and ruler the of Church, the shepherd of the sheep and lambs of Jesus, the rock of Holy Church, the Head and Prince of the Apostles, the unshaken rock against which the gates of hell shall not prevail, the custodian of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. We acknowledge the majestic Head of Rome as the true successor of St. Peter, the rock and the leader of all the faithful, bishop of all bishops, and universal teacher of the Church of Christ. We confess the Church of Rome to be the Mother of all churches, whom we must obey’. He begs the Pope, too, ‘never to receive such calumniators but only those who shall present an introductory letter from Us’.

When the Patriarch of Constantinople, Ephrem of Gapan, heard of this letter he grew furious against the Catholicos Nahapiet. In 1698 he threatened the Armenian *Franks*, as the Catholics were called, with all sorts of punishments, when the people had him deposed in the month of May of that year and sent into exile. They elected in his stead Bishop Melchisidech Subhi who brought Ephrem back from his exile and nominated him Bishop of Adrianople. But Melchisidech too was deposed and the new Patriarch was Bishop Mechitar of Carduk, a meek and kindly personage who was soon overthrown by huge bribes offered by his predecessor Melchisidech, who succeeded him in the office.

Meanwhile Ephrem, Bishop of Adrianople, humiliated those who would not conform with his ideas, and accused as *Franks* to the Government all who did not think like him. His rage increased terribly when he learned that three of his priests had defended the letter written by the Catholicos Nahapiet to the Roman Pontiff. But to crush everyone thoroughly he must have again in his hands the mill-stone of the patriarchate. An astute fellow was he, so he approached the Shek ul-Islam, a friend of his, because open to bribery, and a fellow-countryman as well, and persuaded him that a stop must be put the plots of the *Franks*, who by their faith were spreading their influence amongst the Armenians; an edict must be published at once, declaring those to be rebels who favoured or followed the Franks. When he obtained this decree he was sure of reaching the patriarchate for the third-time, chiefly by bringing accusations against the Patriarch Melchisidech who stood by the three priests of Adrianople. Nor did he fail in his scheme. He gave a great sum of money to the Vizier and to the Shek ul-Islam who resided in Adrianople, and secured the edict against the Franks, that is, the Catholic Armenians. Armed with this he presented himself before the Grand-Vizier and succeeded in sending the three priests into exile as galley-slaves. The Patriarch, seeing the blaze of persecution, hastened to

Adrianople to appease the Shek ul-Islam and Bishop Ephrem, but he was arrested and sent to the galleys, whilst Ephrem again ascended the patriarchal throne.

There went forth, too, the order to arrest as Franks or rebels the four renowned doctors who were preaching the Catholic religion in Constantinople, viz. our friend Mechitar, Khatchatur of Propaganda, Peter of Mezkhita in Georgia, and Dr. Sarkis of Eudocia. However, since they were all in the city at this time, scarcely had they heard of the doings at Adrianople, than three of them hid themselves in the houses of some Armenian friends.

The fourth, who was the Servant of God, Mechitar, when he heard of the impending danger, thought more of his companions than of himself. Immediately assembling all who were in the house, he ordered the books and tools to be sent to a friendly dwelling close at hand, and everyone to retire to his own home. He then betook himself to the Jesuit Fathers in Galata after carefully locking up the building, but since these were not protected by the French Government they deemed it imprudent to detain him longer with them, and advised him to take refuge in the Capuchin Friary at Pera, which enjoyed the protection of the French Ambassador, who was then Monsieur Fériol, a fervent Catholic, a man who feared no one but who was dreaded by the Turks. This Friary was therefore inviolable⁽¹⁾.

(1) The Ambassador in one of his letters to Louis XIV, the great king of France, gives the following information concerning this persecution of Catholic Armenians: 'This persecution is the work of Shek ul-Islam who is a sworn enemy of France and has a great influence over the Sultan... I gave the (persecuted) Armenians every help I could, I protected their leaders and I can say that on my remonstrating, the chief of police in Constantinople mitigated his former orders... This present conflagration is powerful and I am afraid it will bring disastrous results'. *Mélanges Asiatiques*, Bulletin XIX, no. 2. 'The Pretended Armenian Mask of Iron', (in French) by Mr. Brousset, p. 243, Ed. St. Petersburg. 1874.

During the long journey from Galata to Pera Mechitar was in great danger of being arrested, for the detectives who went to his house with this intention were on his track without his knowing it, and they had one in their company who knew the Servant of God, to point him out to them. But by the grace of God what happened to St. Athanasius happened to him — the policemen did not see him. This is also related by a friend of his who followed him at a distance and trembled for his safety. Thus Mechitar arrived safe and sound at the Capuchin Friary where he was received with all kindness as a great confessor of the Catholic faith. When the myrmidons of the law came on the scene, they found the door firmly shut and after knocking at it uselessly for a time they turned away to report matters to the officer who sent them.

During the few months that Mechitar stayed with the Capuchin Friars he never went outside, not even to preach at St. Gregory's, but with the permission of his kind hosts he received into his room a great number of the faithful to whom he imparted the good tidings of the Gospel. All left him consoled and deeply moved, and he recommended himself to their prayers that God might deign to remove the encumbrances which hindered the progress of his mission, and level the path of life he had chosen, that he might do greater good in his holy ministry. The faithful also brought his food to his cell every day lest a vardapiet of their own nation should be a burden to a religious community which was mendicant by rule, and they brought other alms which, along with what he got from selling the books he had printed, would provide for the wants of his companions also⁽¹⁾.

3. But the persecution against Catholics grew hotter every day, and spread like wild-fire into the provinces of Armenia. The Patriarch Ephrem by

(1) F. Matthew. Chap XIII § 12.

means of his worthy friend the Shek ul-Islam obtained an imperial decree by means of which he sent agents everywhere with the command to capture all those Armenians who were suspected of being Catholics. Long and arduous would be the task of describing the events in this furious persecution. The prisons and galleys were full to overflowing with the unfortunate victims, many of whom were subjected to terrible tortures and the confiscation of their property, thus leaving their little ones in the most squalid and miserable poverty. Peter, the Patriarch of the Catholic Syrians of Antioch, rose up to defend the persons thus persecuted and tortured, and protested aloud. 'Ephrem accused him of being a rebel and had him relegated with three other bishops to the castle of Adana, where, overcome with hunger and thirst and consumed by bodily sufferings, the Patriarch and one of the bishops died. The other two succeeded in regaining their freedom with great difficulty after the lapse of two years' (1).

Mechitar saw the danger which threatened his young community. A quiet home was necessary where this spiritual shrub should be free from the cruel buffeting of every storm, and should grow strong and vigorous for the greater glory of God. For many days he prayed and bade his disciples pray earnestly to the Lord for light from heaven, and at last a ray of divine consolation came to comfort him, inspiring him with the idea of transplanting this sacred tree to Christian ground. Then he wrote immediately to his missionaries in Armenia to return with all speed to Constantinople.

Meanwhile he let his mind wander through the Christian lands round about. Someone advised him to withdraw to the Lebanon where the inhabitants were Christian and so too, as a rule, were the authorities. It was also quite near Armenia. But

(1) F. Michael Ciamcian, *History of the Armenians*. Vol. III, Chap. XL. § 5.

Mechitar did not expect in that country a sure refuge or a peaceful life, both of which were necessary for the furtherance of his project, for the Patriarch of Constantinople could exercise a certain influence over the functionaries in the Lebanon by means of the central government.

He knew that a great number of Armenian merchants traded in the Morea, which from the year 1687 was under the dominion of the Venetian Republic and was not far distant from Constantinople. He made inquiries, therefore, from Armenians who knew the country and received flattering information and words of encouragement. He then entered into relations with the Ambassador of the Most Serene Republic, and with the patrician Soranzo, and was confidently assured of the kindest hospitality on the part of the government of Venice. He learned too of the exuberant fertility of the soil and the facility of living.

5. When he had been fully informed on every point he decided to place the question before his companions, especially the elder ones, who had recently returned from the missions and so were possessed of riper knowledge and wider experience. He assembled them all together on the 8th of September in his room at the Capuchin Friary and addressed them in the following terms:

‘You know that I have gathered you round me, not as the vardapiets of our country do, who, after instructing their disciples and conferring on them the doctor’s degree, dismiss them and permit them to go wherever they like. I have assembled you that following the law of the Gospel we might found a permanent congregation according to the rule of St. Anthony the Abbot, whose members should by requisite study fit themselves for supplying the great need of our country — the salvation of souls, to the glory and honour of the Name of the Divine Saviour. Such a Congregation will employ itself in helping our people with their learning, for there we see the the knowledge of the Catholic faith almost blotted

out and the total absence of submission to the Church of Rome¹.



The Interior of the Capuchin Church at Pera.

Then he explained how experience had shown that such an institution was impossible if they tar-

(1) F. Matthew, Chap. XIV, § 14.

ried longer in Constantinople or in the neighbouring country, for there liberty of action in spiritual things was checked nor was it possible to pay proper attention to their studies. He therefore had considered it wise to take counsel together with them on the point and discuss where best they could retire for this holy purpose.

The speech of the leader produced a profound impression on the minds of all, and they understood to a man that it was a question of life or death with their undertaking and that the greatest prudence was necessary. Each one laid bare what he thought most practicable, and at the finish the common opinion was that it was better to migrate to some Christian country and be able to practise the Catholic religion there more freely, and at the same time prepare for the actualization of the principal end of their institute. The Morea was unanimously agreed on at the proposal of the Servant of God.

After this decision all knelt down with a fervour and enthusiasm born of heaven, before a picture of Our Lady, and with joy they offered themselves with great confidence to her as her adopted children, reciting these memorable words, 'Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, we thy unworthy servants offer ourselves as thy adopted children and with the greatest trust in thee we have recourse to thy motherly compassion to guide us to a sure refuge. We promise thee, O most holy Mother, to honour solemnly the day of thy Nativity and its octave, and to have in the churches of our future Congregation a special altar in honour of thy holy birth, to the glory of thy Only begotten Son, who is blessed for ever'.

After this prayer, said by all with tears in their eyes, they rose up consoled and full of a divine courage and a filial trust in the unfailing protection of their amiable Mother. It was decided to call themselves henceforth 'ADOPTED SONS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN, PREACHERS OF PENANCE'. The initials of the four Armenian words for this title, written at the corners of a cross, the emblem of our future salva-

tion became the arms of the new Congregation (1). Finally Mechitar was unanimously chosen as superior and they all promised him obedience and respect. He had then ten disciples of whom four were vardapiets.

When this decision had been come to, the Servant of God sent one of the older priests Father George with a lay-brother to the Morea to get first-hand information as to the conditions of the country, particularly about the water and the air which were said to be bad. So these two went to Nauplia, a city in the Morea and stayed there two months. They ascertained that food was to be found in abundance but that the news concerning the water and air was only too true. Mechitar and his companions, who in their dire poverty well knew that they could not afford meat or wine, and were content to live on vegetables provided there was healthy air and water in the district, grew sad at this news. Then they braced themselves up, placing themselves in the hands of God and fully trusting like little children in their heavenly Mother. Meanwhile they arranged to leave for the Morea without delay, now that there was a truce in the persecution of Catholics through the threats of the Ambassador Monsieur Fériol, and they could secretly board ship without being caught sight of by their enemies. Mechitar was prudent enough to dispatch his companions a few at a time lest he should arouse the vigilant spies who lurked everywhere. They were joined by Bishop Hovnan, the former companion of the Servant of God, who departed from him at Cyprus and who was to be in the community not as a monk but a welcome guest and ordaining bishop.

Mechitar, like a brave captain during a furious tempest, remained near the danger until all were safe from it. But scarcely had one party set out

(1) It is to be seen on the front page of this work.

when a new obstacle made its appearance and gave rise to a fresh persecution.

7. During the doleful troubles at Constantinople, various bishops had come there to see if by intriguing they could succeed to some elevated and lucrative post. The frequent changes of patriarchs had stirred up in them ambitious aspirations. First among these was the infamous Bishop Avetic. He came to Constantinople and very astutely advertised himself as a zealous peacemaker anxious to put an end to these religious quarrels. A great proportion of the people believed him and seeing that he wanted to be Patriarch, as it were to impose peace authoritatively, they pleaded his cause before the Shek ul-Islam, who deposed Ephrem and nominated Avetic patriarch on the 1st. of March, 1702. Scarcely had he the reins of power in his hands than he had his predecessor exiled to Etchmiadzin, mitigated at the first the persecution against Catholics and showed great deference to the injunctions of the French Ambassador. But when the first few months had passed and he saw that the Catholics had not the slightest intention of renouncing their allegiance to the Church of Rome, he set on foot a terrible persecution, sending many to the galleys, where not a few died of the sufferings they had to endure, and scarcely any could manage to secure their liberty by disbursing large sums of money. Hearing that those three priests of Adrianople had been freed from the galleys by offerings of money and that they were being sheltered along with Mechitar at the Capuchin Friary, he cunningly opened a serviceable friendship with Father Hyacinth, the Guardian, with the view of laying hands on the guests.

We must now retrace our steps a little and throw light on an event which took place some time previously and refers to the hostilities between Catholics and schismatics, the better to explain some bold steps taken later on by Bishop Avetic. While the persecution was at its highest, several of the well-intentioned notabilities and bishops were seeking for some way of pacifying the country and

coming to an agreement. This interested the indefatigable Monsieur Fériol who summoned to his presence the Vicar-Apostolic and the Superiors of the various Latin Congregations of Religious, amongst whom F. Hyacinth held an important rank, as also did F. Khatchatur, and he had a document drawn up containing the stipulations of the Catholics, to which the schismatics were to agree. It was written in Latin by Dr. Khatchatur and began in the name of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin and St. Gregory the Illuminator. It said that there was to be an *understanding* between the Armenians who went to Latin Churches (Armenian Catholics), and those who went to Armenian Churches, and was worded in this fashion.

I. It is prescribed that (schismatic) Armenians are not to ask a profession of faith from Catholic Armenians.

II. That anathema is not to be said to the Pope, the Church of Rome, Pope St. Leo or the Council of Chalcedon. Anathema to those who pronounce such an anathema!

III. That the (schismatic) Armenians are no longer to curse Pope St. Leo and the Council of Chalcedon on certain fixed days, as they have been accustomed to do.

IV. Since the Latin Church approves of the rite of the Armenian Church and wishes all Armenians to retain it, and the priests to sing and recite the divine office and celebrate Mass according to the Armenian and not the Latin rite, and, when the union of the Churches is secured, that the laity frequent Armenian churches and receive there the Sacraments of the Church, so the above - mentioned Armenians recognising the Church of Rome as holy and the first (of all Churches) and her children as their elder brothers, must in no way teach what is opposed to the said Roman Church.

As regards the Armenian Catholics.

a) They were to frequent the Armenian churches.

b) On Sundays and greater festivals they were to

go the Armenian churches, confess to whichever priest they chose, communicate along with others according to the Armenian rite and observe the abstinences and fasts of the Armenian rite.

If ever one of the parties in dispute called the other a 'heretic', the Ambassador of France would have him handed over to the civil authorities for punishment.

A copy of this agreement was sent to Propaganda and another to the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin for approbation. Things were to remain unchanged under the surveillance of the Ambassador of France. A third copy was preserved in the Capuchin Archives at Pera ¹.

All these plans, though never realized, were known to Bishop Avetic. He rather appeared very anxious to have Mechitar and the three priests of Adrianople sheltered in the Capuchin Friary. He waited for a propitious moment, then invited the Superior of this monastery along with the elder fathers to a sumptuous banquet. He offered the place of honour to F. Hyacinth, spoke to him of the great respect he had towards the Church of Rome and how he was willing to renew the old alliance as existed between St. Gregory the Illuminator and Pope St. Sylvester and how he and his people would be obedient to the Holy See. However he said he was in need of pecuniary aid and would like Dr. Mechitar and the other three priests to come and help him in preaching and in catechising. He also gave the superior a copy of all this in writing and

1 A copy of the original in Latin is to be found in Brousset's book, 'Le prétendu Masque de fer arménien', p. 244-6. Katchatur's signature is very interesting. It contains the following statement: 'I, Khatchatur, an Armenian priest, as above. I believe the document of peace just written to be a most efficacious means for the union of the Armenian Church with that of Rome and the calming of persecutions throughout the whole Ottoman Empire'.

all the friars were persuaded of his sincerity; they even defended him before those who put no faith in the cunning bishop's words.

Mechitar knew of these dealings between the Patriarch and F. Hyacinth, and saw that the latter was so fully convinced that he deemed it useless to contradict him. But he did not in the least expect that F. Hyacinth was making arrangements about his own person when he was contemplating a departure for the Morea. One may well then imagine the wonder and uneasiness of the Servant of God when the Superior quietly told him and the other three that the long-sought-for peace was now, after so many trials, an accomplished fact. He said all four were to go to the Patriarch and help him in the work of union and propaganda. He added they should go to the Ambassador Fériol and thank him for his protection and the asylum they found at the friary. Meanwhile an autograph letter came to Mechitar from the Patriarch, in which he was called 'beloved son' and was told that the Patriarch was anxiously waiting to embrace him and have him always by him as his right hand. 'But you did not wish to come. I forgive you if you come now. Therefore do not delay. Immediately on the receipt of my letter, come to me and I promise to raise you to great honours and put you over important mansions in my house. Fare well'¹.

When Mechitar read this letter he turned to F. Hyacinth and addressed him in all humility and sincerity. He said he was eternally grateful to him for his kindness, promised to go to the Ambassador as advised, but absolutely refused to go near the Patriarch, and these last words he pronounced in a tone of great determination.

8. On this declaration F. Hyacinth sought to persuade him in a thousand ways to change his

1. Annals of the Mechitarian Congregation. Vol. I, year 1702. pp. 56-7.

mind. Mechitar, who knew Avetic of old in Erzerum, humbly indeed but firmly refused to move. The Superior then informed him that if he remained obstinate in his refusal, he must leave the friary, for a formal promise had been made to the Patriarch to send him. Our hero answered that he preferred to leave, and begged the Superior to let him stay but to night-fall, lest the direction of his flight be noticed. Meanwhile he betook himself to the Ambassador with the other three priests and thanked him. Then he returned to the Capuchins and left with his few belongings under cover of the night, after thanking the fathers for their hospitality.

The short space of time at his disposal did not permit of his finding another convenient hiding-place, so he had to rent a room in the house of a Frenchman, a wine-seller, and there he lay concealed for some days.

The three Catholic priests of Adrianople, though very diffident, nevertheless overcome by the persistence of F. Hyacinth, went to the Patriarch. He received them kindly, but after a few days he had them arrested and sent to the galleys as Franks and rebels.

9. Mechitar, after passing a day or two in the French merchant's house, went at night to an Armenian friend and there came also those of his pupils who had not yet departed for the Morea. They lived here fifteen days in a low, dark attic, avoiding every slight noise, speaking in a low voice, keeping back every tendency to cough, knowing that they were being hunted for by the Patriarch. Mechitar succeeded in sending off a few more of his disciples to the Peloponnesus and finally dressing himself and the remaining three as merchants, he secretly embarked with these on a ship bound for Smyrna. When he arrived in that city he went (still dressed as a merchant) to a hotel and waited for a ship to pass on the way to the Morea. He acquainted a trusty friend of his arrival and address in Smyrna, and during the day he went to see him as if to do business with him. A few days later one of

the notabilities of the city learned that a warrant had come from Constantinople to the local magistrate for the arrest of an Armenian priest, turned Frank, who had fled from the Capital for Smyrna. Mechitar understood and decamped. He went to the Jesuits who kept him well hidden. Since a ship for the Morea was long in coming into port, and one was ready to set sail for Venice, he thought of taking this one instead and leaving it at Zante, making the passage to the Morea later, and thus escape the present danger of arrest. In October of 1702 he returned most heartfelt thanks to the Fathers of the Society of Jesus who under all circumstances had been excellent counsellors and safe guardians, and embarked on the Venice ship. Since he going to Latin countries where he neither knew nor was known, and was ignorant of the languages there spoken, and the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, he asked the Archbishop of Smyrna, Mgr. Daniel Duranti to give him a commendatory letter. The Prelate acquiesced willingly and wrote in the following tenour:

We, Brother Daniel Duranti, Archbishop of Scoppia and Administrator of the Church of Smyrna,

Having been informed that Mr. Mechitar, an Armenian by birth and by religion a Catholic, has long ago embraced the true faith, and by his preaching and good example has brought many of his countrymen to the bosom of the Church of Rome, and for that very reason has suffered greatly at the hands of the heretics, we therefore believe him worthy of being considered a Catholic among Catholics, and, wherever he goes or stays, of being received and kindly treated. In testimony of this we present him with this letter undersigned by our own hand and sealed with the Archbishopal seal.

Smyrna. 20th Oct. 1702.

Bro. Daniel Duranti, Archb. of Scop and Administrator of the Church of Smyrna.

L. S.

10. Scarcely had the ship which was bringing the Servant of God set sail from Smyrna when it

was caught in a terrible storm. The impetuous wind took hold of it and hurled it like a piece of wood through and above the mountainous waves. For several days it was the play of the elements. The main-mast was shattered and so all control of the ship was lost. It was a real miracle that they did not sink to the bottom of the sea which was bellying and roaring in its call for victims. During those awful days Mechitar, amid the confused rumble of the raging storm and the despairing wails of the passengers, remained calm, tranquil and confident in God, nor did he ever cease from prayer. He even managed to compose a hymn of praise to the Blessed Virgin, in rhymed verse, beginning with the words, 'O chosen amongst mortals', in which he minutely describes the tempest, refers to the perturbed and stormy conscience of the sinner, and begs of Our Lady in words of fire to protect him from the fury of the waves, which the devil has aroused.

The fear and anxiety of the passengers gave place to calm, the winds hushed, the breakers smoothed down and over the peaceful sea glided the ship, finally casting anchor in the island of Zante after seventeen days' journey. Mechitar, after so many physical and moral dangers, disembarked at length with his companions and on setting foot on Christian soil an indescribable joy radiated on his countenance, and caused a holy trembling in his soul. Enthusiastically he thanked the Lord for saving him from the snares of his enemies and from the waves of the threatening, boiling sea. He wrote immediately to his disciples in the Morea, informing them of everything, praising the island of Zante, speaking of the kind welcome he received from the ecclesiastical authorities and the inhabitants, and manifesting his desire of remaining in that place, as if chosen by Providence. He received a reply. Then on the welcome arrival of one of his dear companions from the Morea he learned of their joy at his coming and the affectionate respect of the disciples for their master. The new-comer related

the cordial reception received from the Venetian authorities, who were willing to grant villages and fields so that the country develop and the earth be fertilized and give rich harvests. When Mechitar, who had been almost tempted to summon his friends to Zante, heard this good news, he determined to go to the Morea and arrived at Nauplia, the principal town, in February, 1703. It is easier to imagine than describe the exultation of father and sons on finding themselves together again, safe now from all dangers. Two by two they brought their good father and master to the chapel, and kneeling down they there thanked our merciful Lord who with his powerful hand had freed his poor servants from the lion's fangs; and with burning words and a filial heart they thanked also our Blessed Lady, renewing their promises to remain ever her dutiful sons.

They were sixteen now, twelve of home were professed monks and the rest aspirants, except Bishop Hovnan who properly speaking did not form part of the community but had warmly espoused the holy cause. They all lived together in a house rented provisionally, for the first arrivals had wished to defer the purchase of a fixed abode until their venerated chief should join them.

CHAPTER VII.

The Mechitarian Community at Modon.

1. The Venetian government of the Morea grants Mechitar's Community land in Modon. — 2. Monastic life. — Vows made before the superior Mechitar. — 3. He resorts to the Holy See to have the approval of the Constitution — Fathers Elias and John depart for Rome by Venice. — 4. At Rome they are welcomed by the Venetian Ambassador. — The kindly audience of Pope Clement XI. — 5. The great poverty of the new Community at Modon. — The underhand dealings of their enemies in the East. — 6. Construction of the monastery by loans. — 7. Mechitar has recourse to the Venetian authorities. — He is helped by Angel Emo, Sebastian Mocenigo, and Armenian merchants. — 8. Opening of the church with great festivities. — 9. Benevolence of the people and the Venetian authorities. — Cunning plots of the Greek schismatic bishop against Mechitar. — Mechitar comes out victorious.

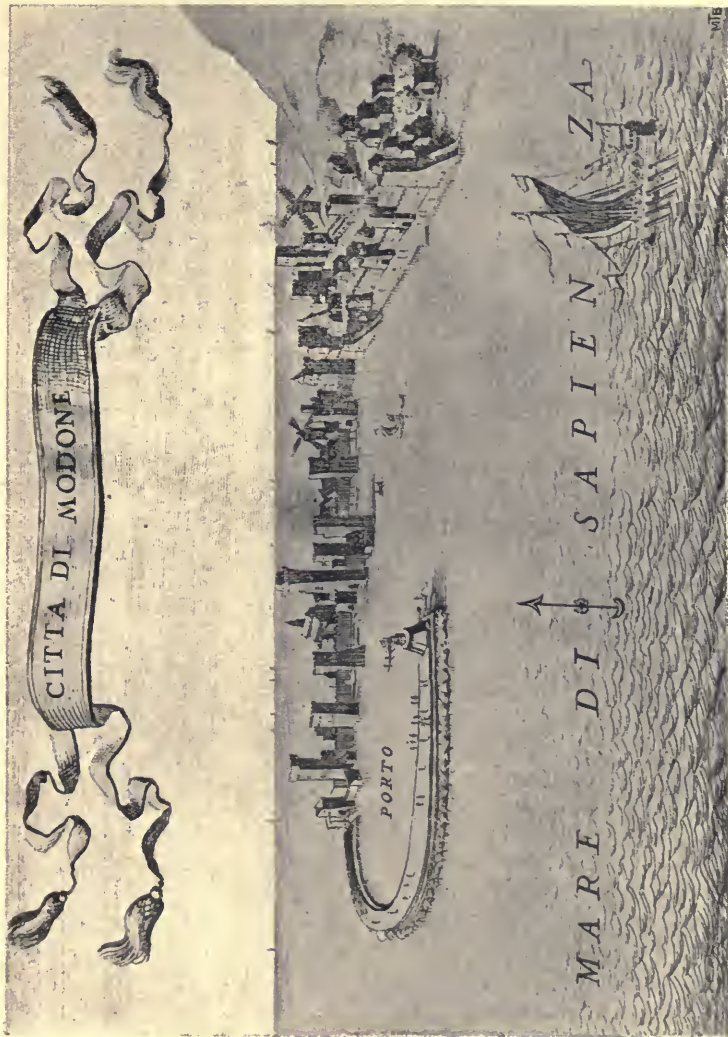
1. Scarcely had Mechitar arrived again among his own than, without a moment's delay, he assembled the elder priests in council to determine what steps were to be taken for the proper management of the Community, materially and spiritually, in the way of the Lord and in their studies. First of all a proper monastic dwelling was required, as having a great influence on religious discipline. It was decided to establish the Congregation definitely in the Morea, since the country was for many reasons most suitable, especially as it was near the Levant, which

was to be the field of their labours. They agreed to have a monastery in the city of Modon (also called Methone), where besides westerns there were some Armenian acquaintances, and where living was cheap¹.

After coming to these vital conclusions, they sent in a petition on this head to the Censors of the Venetian government, residing in Nauplia, accompanying it with a warm recommendation from the ambassador of Constantinople, the patrician Soranzo. Their demand was laid before the Council and was favourably received. In Modon sufficient space was granted Mechitar to construct a monastery and church, and he was given, too, the whole village of Galason and a part of the village of Mavramatta as an appanage, but on condition that the building of the monastery would be begun within three years of the donation, otherwise all these grants would by right return to the government. Meanwhile the Community was presented with a large house belonging to the demesne, and here Mechitar and his companions took up their abode.

2. The first thing the Servant of God did on taking possession of such a large building was to choose an appropriate room as an oratory — as God's own dwelling, and then he underwent a course of spiritual exercises for several days. All the others joyfully did the same, because in this way they were taking a step forward in the monastic life. For greater security the Servant of God wished them to follow the rule of St. Anthony the Abbot, already known to them, but to the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience he added a fourth — that of missionwork, to spread the true faith in his own country, intending, however, to submit everything

1. Mechitar describes in a letter to a friend at Venice, Mr. Noradungh (1712) the fruitful vineyards of Modon, 'With 15 or 20 piastres one can rent a large garden for a year'.



City of Modon.

in due time to the will of the Severeign Pontiff, as his venerable biographer writes. 'Meanwhile he permitted four old fathers, Elias, John, George and Emmanuel, who had been with him now a long time, and had given proof of their monastic spirit, to make their vows before the superior they had chosen. This took place in the oratory in the presence of all the members of the Community. To these elder priests, who were already doctors (of divinity) he confided the affairs of the Congregation. For the rest, who lived apart, he arranged hours for choir, prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, and study of grammar, physics, philosophy and theology¹. He put them all on trial to see if they had a vocation to the life they intended to choose. Certainly at such a distance from the East it must have been exceptionally difficult to find numerous aspirants; nevertheless he was very attentive and watchful in his choice and sent back home whomsoever he in conscience judged unfit for the religious life.

He insisted in all things, whether it were a question of food or anything else, on uniformity among the members, he insistently preached charity among the brethren, he recommended warmly holiness of life and the good example of every virtue in and out of the monastery. Hence it is no wonder that bishops, princes and people of that country were very enthusiastic over this colony of monks, whom they called the *Armenian Fathers*².

All wondered to see in Mechitar, the fervent and zealous warrior of the truths of faith, the priest who in his zeal united indissolubly the love of his faith with the sincere love of his country. He loved indeed the true faith, but he loved likewise and was affectionately drawn to the sacred traditions, the rites, and the literature of his country. And this love was no mere diplomacy or sham. Just as his

1. F. Matthew, Chap. XIV, § 8.

2. " " , Chap. XIV, § 2.

great love for God was spontaneous, sincere, and heartfelt, so also his love for the spiritual welfare of his country was sincere, and these two loves he wished to be transmitted, as a sacred heirloom, to succeeding generations of his disciples.

3. Meanwhile more recruits came from the East, the elder members made daily progress in discipline and study, and so the Community became numerous and strong, and took the real form of a monastic Order. Then Mechitar understood the occasion was ripe for putting into execution what he had long desired and prepared. He felt himself animated to repair to the Holy See and humbly submit his Constitution to the Supreme Authority and have its confirmation, so that his Congregation, built on a solid foundation through the blessing of the Lord and His Vicar on earth, might go forward in God's way with a sure and firm step, and help his country as much as he desired. He therefore chose two of the most advanced fathers, Elias and John, and consigning to them the rule of St. Anthony the Abbot, which they had hitherto followed, and the testimonial letters of the Archbishops of Smyrna and Cephalonia and of the Provisioners General of the Venetian Republic in the kingdom of the Morea, he sent them to Rome — to the feet of the Sovereign Pontiff Clement XI.

4. The two priests first directed their steps to Venice where they received a festive welcome from their countrymen and the Rector of the Armenian church. The authorities were very generous and overwhelmed them with attentions, presenting them with fresh recommendations for their ambassador in the Eternal City. The two envoys, provided with these documents and introductory letters arrived at Rome in the first days of September 1705.

Their first visit was to the Venetian Palace where the ambassador of the Most Serene received them cordially and kindly, promised them all assistance in their mission, and brought them in person to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda, who was at that time the renowned Cardinal Sacripante, a first-rate business-man and of a paternal condescension

towards inferiors. For many a year he worthily ruled that Congregation. The two fathers presented to him their commendatory letters and were assured of a kindly interest on his part; then on the day fixed, the ambassador brought them to the Holy Father's presence.

Clement XI who had been already informed of these new, powerful champions of Catholicism in the Orient, received them fatherly and joyfully. They presented to the Pontiff a memorial written on June 5th, in which they told the story of their Community, the persecution against Catholics in the East, their transference to christian lands in the West and the impossibility of founding a monastery in Armenia for the end they had in view. Then they added, 'To You, most blessed Father we tender humble and lively thanks for recommending to Catholic ambassadors in the East the defence of persecuted Catholics. It was thus that the Venetian ambassador, the Most High Laurence Soranzo, now Procurator of St. Mark's, at Your Holiness's word, saved us from our oppressors, protected us for several days in his palace, looking after all our needs, and, after many other kindnesses, accompanied us with his letters of recommendation to the Morea; and thanks to this recommendation the Most Illustrious Prince gave us ground to build a monastery and church for ourselves. He gave us also a certain income which, along with what we already have, we trust will be sufficient for our purpose. We are already in the second year of the three assigned to us as a term, and we have not as yet built our monastery, because we wished first of all to submit everything to the Supreme Head of Christendom, in order that everything may proceed with the approbation and the paternal blessing of Your Holiness. It is the intention of all of us to live humbly, according to the custom of Armenian monks, in the observance of the holy vows... .. and in preserving the rites of the Armenian Church, to be able without let or hindrance, yea rather with greater effectiveness preach among all the truths of faith, as far as our weakness will permit.

The Pope received their petition like a real father, questioned them with great interest, spoke to them words of encouragement and comfort, and in these two monks blessed with all his heart the distant Community, sending by means of them indulgences for their superior and his subjects. Then he dismissed them, promising to second their holy wishes, to act as soon as possible, and to send the papers to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda.

According to the wise custom of this Congregation, no matter what Constitution, before being approved, had to be subjected to a lengthy examination and discussed in every detail, and on this account years and years often passed before approval was given. In the case of the Constitution of this new Community, the affair immediately took a most threatening aspect, because, scarcely had this action of Mechitar's become known, than all his adversaries, in great part former students of the Propaganda College, poured into the Sacred Congregation a quantity of letters, in which they accused Mechitar's missionaries of heterodox teaching and of other things which we shall hear about in the chapters to follow.

Meanwhile F. Elias, not to wait too long in Rome when his presence was useful at Modon, with the permission of his Eminence, the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda, returned there in 1706. When he arrived, he never wearied of recounting to his superior and brethren the affable welcome of the Holy Father, his eager promises, his blessings and his indulgences. The little Community, crushed under the weight of so many material and mental discomforts, laid aside for a moment its mournful garment and put on a joyful one. Mechitar wrote to F. John to learn well Latin and Italian while in Rome, for they were becoming most necessary for the Community; and F. John by his untiring application became so proficient in those five years as to be able to translate faultlessly many texts and spiritual books.

To the consoling news coming from Rome with F. Elias, were added more from the East with re-

ference to Mechitar's first missionaries. Out of a host of letters we transcribe but one, as being most authoritative, coming as it does from so exalted a personage as the Chaldean Patriarch:

Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Sir,

I come to greet you, Most Illustrious Sir, with these few lines and to show what respect I have towards your Most Illustrious person. Your dear apostle and, at the same time, preacher of the Gospel of Christ, came to these parts and produced great fruit in the Lord's vineyard. However we pray you not to forget this country of the Apostles. Father George (Kiuerk) did not forget, but preached in Diarbekir about two months, and three months in the city of Mardin, and by the grace of God he enlightened many who were sleeping in the darkness of sin and also in schism. We thank you, Most Illustrious Sir, for the care you have taken of our spiritual concerns. Much more do I rejoice at the foundation of the college (i. e. the Congregation) at Mora (in the Morea), for I hope that many great and holy subjects will issue forth from it.

Meanwhile I kiss Your Lordship's forehead, and remain
Given in Diarbekir, the year of the Lord
1706, March 22nd.

By the grace of the Omnipotent God,
Joseph II, Patriarch of the Chaldees¹.

Mechitar wished to help everyone but other matters in the Community absorbed all his attention.

6. Time was passing, and the third year had arrived since the time when the Morean government had granted the grounds with the saving clause. The-

1. The original copy of this letter which is to be found in the opposite page, one - quarter of the original size, is written in wretched Itlalian. So the translation I have given, I do not put forward as certain. The words written in Syriac (Nestorian characters) are merely his signature, exactly as in the Latin characters. The seal contains it once more. The meaningless strokes are not hieroglyphics but mere flourishes of the pen (Tr.)

Ill.^{mo} è Rev.^{mo} Sig.^{no}

Tengo à nuocere V.S. Ill.^{ma} con queste poche righe
è mostrando il desiderio grande che ne ho verso di V.S.
ill.^{ma}: perciò venne in queste parti il vostro caro Apostolo
et insieme predicatore del uangelo di Christo, il quale
senè fece grandissimo frutto nella uigna del sig.^{no} però
La preghiamo di non scordar queste parti delli Apostoli
conforme fece qui Kuerk Marabbi, il quale predicò
in Chorbestir circa due mesi, e nella città di Mardine circa
tre mesi e per grazia del sig.^{no} illuminò moltissimi che
dormivano nelle tenebre del peccato, e anche nelle scisme
e ringraziamo V.S. ill.^{ma} della sua cura presa del uigorio
spirituale e molto più mi valego della fondazione dell
collegio noua perche là spero che se ne uscirà grandi
ri saggisti et insieme santi. intanto bacio la fronte
di V.S. e rimango.

Saro in Diarbekir

Anno dell' sig.^{no}
1706.

Marzo 22



Per grazia del sig.^{no}

Ommnipotente Giouge

seco Patriarcha de Chaldei

Servant of God had absolutely to build if he did not want to lose all, but he had no means, not even for their daily food. From nowhere came a gleam, of hope. He was ashamed and justly feared to repair to the government and lay bare his condition, for that would have provoked a great distrust in him. To these troubles others were added through the serious illness of two of his young pupils, one of whom, after long suffering from typhoid fever, while the doctor declared a catastrophe imminent and the whole community were praying in tears, was unexpectedly cured by God. But the other young flower, a novice, Stephen by name, passed away, leaving his spiritual father and brethren weeping for him, and was transplanted into the garden of heaven.

Mechitar in his squalid poverty had spent everything in trying everything to save the two young men, and so his misery increased beyond measure. Meanwhile there came news of the arrival in Rome of accusations against the Community. The ground was not producing as much as was hoped, and under this load of misfortunes the Servant of God fell, struck down with a violent typhoid fever. There was no money to procure a remedy for him, and his disciples stood around their father's bed, heart-broken, tears in their eyes, powerless to help him. With great anguish they understood that, if he were wanting, it was all over with the Congregation, and they would have to disperse without even the means to bring them home.

But the Lord meant to preserve that life for the greater good of souls and the glory of His name, and so, without other means, without other medicines than patience, resignation and prayer, in a few days the fever left him, and Mechitar could rise and go to the church with his sons, to thank the Lord for his immense bounty.

Everything returned shortly to its normal course — prayer, study, work, instruction to the young, preparation of the fathers for the missions. F. Emmanuel, a priest of no common zeal, was sent as an apostle to Eudocia. New aspirants came to Mo-

don, and some of the elder ones, now ready, received sacred orders from Bishop Hovnan.

The time for commencing to build was pressing, so he borrowed 500 piastres from an Armenian merchant bound for Eudocia, presenting him with a money - order to be changed for him by F. Emmanuel in that city, where the faithful had given him, as stipends for masses, 500 piastres to be forwarded to Mechitar. He hoped, besides, that from Eudocia, where he was so well known and loved, there would be sent to help him 1000 piastres. Therefore, trusting in God he laid the first stone of the monastery in March 1706.

But suddenly another difficulty crops up. The merchant who had lent the 500 piastres, when he got to Eudocia and presented his money - order, did not receive payment from F. Emmanuel, because Mechitar's enemies had spread the rumour throughout Asia Minor that he had fled from the Morea, driven out by the Venetian authorities, that his disciples were dispersed, and his community broken up, and so money for masses was not to be sent to him nor new disciples.

On hearing these calumnies, the faithful who had given money, demanded straightaway restitution. The merchant took great pains to persuade the Eudocians that the rumour was untrue and that the Congregation was progressing under the blessing of God and men and was respected by the ecclesiastical and civil authorities. To prove this he showed some letters of Mechitar to a friend, and finally, if not all, many at all events were persuaded that the Community was not dispersed, and so a part of the stipends could be had to pay the money - order of 500 piastres.

But such a sum was very small for the construction of a monastery. Mechitar sold for two years the grapes and other fruit grown on the ground granted to him, but even this was insufficient. Then he took loans at a heavy interest, and under the weight of these debts, he could complete the building of the monastery, which turned out to be the

most handsome edifice in the citadel of Modon, with a facade of 51 yards and a breadth of 37. He himself was the architect, he guided and watched over the building, to the great wonder of the authorities and inhabitants of the city. This surprising architectonic skill of his will be seen later on in the construction of the monastery of St. Lazarus at Venice.

Having thus built within the limits of the contract, the danger of losing the property was gone, and as soon as it was possible, the monks removed to the well-constructed monastery with legitimate satisfaction and long-looked-for joy.

7. But the debts were increasing with giant strides. Mechitar had pledged a part of the silver plate he possessed, and had sold all that was not absolutely necessary. They ate bread and cooked vegetables, never meat or wine; they dressed miserably, full of confidence in the God of mercies, Who would come to succour them. One very sad day there was no money to buy bread. Mechitar, after praying fervently to God, who provides the birds of the air with food and enlightens his faithful servants, betook himself to the Provisioner – General of the Peloponnese, Angel Emo, a Venetian patrician, a pious and generous soul, who, hearing of their poverty, ordered grain and biscuits to be given to them immediately in sufficient quantity, just as was given to the soldiers. Mechitar could not find words to thank him enough. He returned home quite content, ran to the church and kneeling down there, as was his custom in good or bad fortune, tendered warm thanks to the Omnipotent Lord and Benefactor. When he had thus procured his food, he found a means of supplying clothing. There remained several pieces of silk brought from Constantinople. He sent them to Nauplia, changed them for serge, and, beginning with himself, he had a soutane made for everyone, knowing that the garment would last for several years, until he should have the means to make their habits of less coarse material, as he wished, and as was afterwards done.

During all this period of miserable poverty, the spiritual and intellectual progress of the members suffered not a whit. The superior gave good example to all. Every day he gave lessons in rhetoric and grammar to two classes, and with as much interest and satisfaction as if he had no other thoughts or occupations. Every lesson had to begin and end with prayer, because, said he, everything had to be done for the glory of the Lord, Who is the beginning and end of all things; and the Lord did not abandon him.

Generous souls, coming to hear of his poverty so diligently hidden, began to help him with alms. The noble prince, Angel Emo, connected with the Servant of God by a particular affection and veneration, sent him 150 piastres¹ which were the fine of a prisoner, and which, according to the custom of the Venetian government, had to be given to help poor monasteries². The noble patrician, Sebastian Mocenigo, commander-in-chief of the army in the Peloponnese (afterwards a worthy Doge in 1722) sent 150 piastres, the fine of another prisoner, to which he added 50 piastres of his own.

8. On receiving these offerings, the Servant of God, though not yet free from debt, felt courage enough to begin building the church. By order of Angel Emo the stones and plaster were to be given by the government — a facilitation which induced Mechitar to invite immediately the bishop of Corinth to lay the foundation-stone. The polite and venerable prelate wished the indefatigable superior of the community to represent him on this occasion, so he delegated Mechitar to perform the ceremony. In March of 1708, Mechitar, surrounded by Bishop Hovnan, other vardapiets, priests and novices and a great concourse of people, accomplished the sa-

1. A piastre was worth about 3 s. 7 d. sterling.

2. In Ribadeneira's 'Life of St. Ignatius' we find that this custom was prevalent in England in the time of St. Ignatius.

cred function with a solemnity never witnessed in those parts before. The pious patrician and governor



Sebastian Mocenigo, 112th Doge of Venice

of the Morea, Angel Emo, was present, with all the other functionaries of the kingdom, and there assi-

sted, too, all the military authorities with battalions from every regiment.

When Mechitar had blessed the corner-stone, he invited the Governor, too, to take it in his hands, and together they lowered it into the hole. At that moment, on a given signal, all the forts fired a salute, from all sides trumpets sounded and martial music ascended majestically to heaven. Tears of joy ran down everyone's cheeks, and the people were proud of this festival and of the honour rendered by the Governor, who on that occasion made the Servant of God a present of forty Venetian sequins¹.

9. With this help and other alms Mechitra succeeded in finishing the church, which was really beautiful and was consecrated by the Archbishop of Corinth. Crowds flocked to it, for Mass was celebrated there from morning till midday, and it was a pleasant sight to see the wonderful example of those monks, so pious and simple, austere in their manner of living, yet happy at the same time. From time to time the Governor went there too, that is, every time he passed by to visit the citadel of Modon. Before everything else he marched to the church with all the military and civil authorities, and then he went to the monastery to visit the superior, Father Mechitar, and the elder monks. He always had words of admiration and encouragement for them, and sung their praises everywhere, as is testified by the adjoining letter of commendation left by him to Mechitar for some opportune occasion.

10. How much the Servant of God was venerated by the authorities and by Prince Sebastian Mocenigo appears clearly from the following circumstance.

In the citadel of Modon there were four churches: the first was that of the Latins, the second that of the Sciots (a colony of the island of Scio), the third belonged to the Armenian Fathers, the

1. A coin worth 9 s. 4 d. of English money.

fourth to the Greeks who had at their head, a bishop who was not in communion with the See of Rome. Each church had its faithful and proceeded according to its own rite and certain determined regulations. On some festivals, such as St. Mark and Corpus Christi, a solemn procession came out from the Latin Church, and the priests of the other churches with their flocks joined in, in the order mentioned above. The Greek bishop thought it a real mortification for himself and his native people to be put not only after the Sciots, but also after the late arrivals viz, the Armenian monks. He therefore began secret intrigues and compelled the Prefect, who had not even the remotest suspicion of the Greek bishop's intentions, to obtain from the Governor, who was the patrician Sebastian Mocenigo, that he, the bishop of a Greek diocese, should immediately follow the Latin clergy in the procession. The Governor, unaware of the real and hidden aims of the Greek prelate, thought it well not to oppose his wish, so he published a decree according to the petition presented, and sent it to the Prefect who kept everything a secret until the day of the procession. But an intimate friend of Mechitar's, and the Governor's physician, by name Dominic, a fervent Catholic, got to hear of the plot, and sent an express courier to Mechitar to let him know of the trap set by the schismatic bishop. The Servant of God wrote immediately to the prince, showing the painful consequences of such a decree which gave the place of honour to Greek schismatics, and how it would cause a scandal among the faithful who with reason would accuse the prince of favouring the schismatics. By the same courier he dispatched this letter to Dominic who, on presenting it to the prince, should second the Catholic cause.

Sebastian Mocenigo, on receiving Mechitar's letter and perceiving the intentions of the Greek bishop and the scandal which would follow his decree, immediately sent to Mechitar a letter from himself, which he said that by the word 'Latin' he intended

to include also the Armenian monks, because they belonged to the Church of Rome, and were therefore to walk with the Latins in the solemnities.

One day, before the procession came off, the Prefect summoned Mechitar and read the decree according to which the Greek bishop and his flock were to come immediately after the Latin clergy in the procession. Mechitar then produced the more recent letter of the governor, which said that the Armenian monks were to be considered as one with the Latin clergy, because they belonged to the Church of Rome. The Prefect bowed his head and everything was arranged as in Mechitar's letter. Never was it known how or by what means that letter came. Father Matthew of Eudocia, Mechitar's secretary, who died with the reputation of a saint, when relating this fact, observes that his master did not ask for precedence through feelings of ambition, but only in the spirit of never separating himself from the Latin Catholics¹.

1. On this question of the communion of Catholics and schismatics in religious functions we think it opportune to insert here the famous allocution of Benedict XIV to the members of the Holy Office, 24th February, 1752 — three years after the death of the Servant of God. (The whole matter will be thoroughly dealt with in a special chapter further on). 'Then it happened that especially in countries subject to Venetian rule, both a Latin and a schismatic bishop were to be found. Between them not only civil but also religious communion has been brought in. On this head he (i. e. the Pope) mentioned a famous procession which used to take place at Corcyra on the solemnity of Corpus Christi in which Greeks and Latins go two by two, the former on the left, the latter on the right, and finally come the Latin Archbishop similarly on the right and the Greek bishop on the left. This solemn and mixed procession did not please F. Quirino, when he was over the Corcyrean church, and to place the matter under the eyes of the Pope, he sent to Rome a letter describing the above-mentioned public ceremony, which letter for a long time was kept in the Quirinal palace, but now is more conveniently preserved in Castel Gandolfo. He therefore asked

CHAPTER VIII.

The Holy See approves the Constitution. Mechitar Abbot.

1. The question of the Constitution. — 2. Accusations in the East against Mechitar's missionaries. — The defence of the Archbishop of Corinth. — 3. The Holy See approves of the Constitution. — Mechitar accepts the Rule of St. Benedict. — 4. The profession of Mechitar and his monks before the Archbishop of Corinth. — Mechitar Abbot. — 5. The Blessed Virgin's protection of Mechitar's work.

1. Whilst the material construction of Mechitar's house was happily completed, whilst the estimation and veneration of his person was known to all and proclaimed by the people and the authorities both civil and religious, whilst praise and encouragement poured in on him from all sides, especially from the Archbishop Angel Mary Carlini of the Order of Friars Preachers, Mechitar wore a smile on his

the Roman See to prohibit this solemn function. He received an answer back that if it were prudently to be feared that this prohibition would cause quarrels, or damage to property or other evils, then it would be better to tolerate this thing than prohibit it. Hence the Most Holy (i. e. the Pope) again deduced that this communion with schismatics could not be altogether and on every occasion declared illicit'. *Collectanea S. C. de P. F. Rome, 1893, p. 743.*

countenance but sorrow reigned in his heart, for five years had now gone by and as yet no sign of the arrival from Rome of the long-sighed-for approbation of the Constitution which he believed to be the blessing and the seal of his work from Jesus Christ and His Vicar on earth.

Everyone knows how the Sacred Roman Congregations proceed with a prudent, calm, measured and oftentimes slow step in uttering sentences which are of a grave nature and will remain matters for discussion hereafter in the Church. Among such questions must be numbered the foundation of a new religious Congregation. So it was that full five years had passed away and there had not yet appeared the approbation of the Constitution presented to Pope Clement XI. Besides the gravity of the situation, other unpleasant circumstances contributed to the delay.

Against Mechitar, but above all, against his missionaries numerous accusations had reached Rome. He was accused of working independently of the ecclesiastical authorities duly constituted in the East, and of introducing novelties into the Divine Office. His missionaries were guilty of deplorable ignorance and an exaggerated opinion of their master's knowledge. Mechitar kept silent for a time like his Divine Master, calumniated yet all the while never opening his mouth, but the matter reached the ears of Mgr. Carlini, the greatest admirer, as we shall see, of Mechitar and his disciples, who in his every diocesan visit could not find words flattering enough to manifest his approval of their holy life, monastic discipline and their zeal in defence of the Church of Rome. Since to conceal this truth at a time when the newly-born Congregation of Mechitar was beaten about by the storm of so many unjust and malicious accusations, would be sinful, he considered it his duty to make them known to the Holy See by confuting the adversaries of the Servant of God.

3. The Sacred Congregation on the receipt of such authoritative testimony knew that all these accusations were the result of human deceitfulness

and thought it time to put an end to the calumnies and grant a well-merited triumph to unknown innocence and trampled justice. Therefore in August of 1711, the new Constitution confirmed and approved was sent to the Archbishop of Corinth, Angel Mary Carlini by the hands of Father John who had been waiting for it all this time in Rome. However since the Holy See did not institute more new orders, it allowed the new Community to choose one of the following Rules: St. Basil's, St. Augustine's, St. Benedict's. All the members of the new Community from first to last were to make their profession before the Archbishop of the diocese.

Mgr. Carlini, on receiving the necessary papers from Father John, with great glee summoned Mechitar to Nauplia immediately and officially communicated to him the approbation of the Constitution and the other dispositions of Propaganda, which permitted also the fourth vow of 'Mission-work'.

Mechitar, arrived at the long-expected goal, thanked God with a jubilant heart and would not hesitate a moment to make his profession, for he made it on the spot before the Archbishop with two other fathers who had accompanied him to Nauplia. As regards the choice of a Rule he took counsel with the other members of the Community and then chose the Rule of St. Benedict, because it was more suited to the new Constitution and because it was already known to Armenians, having been translated since the tenth century by St. Narses of Lambro¹. The S. C. of Propaganda was informed of all this

1 In his deposition at the first Process, Archbishop Soukias Somalian, fourth Abbot-General of the Congregation, says, 'As regards the Constitutions, I must say that Father Mechitar, taking the rule of St. Benedict merely as a base, introduced some modifications of it on those points where it could not be adapted to suit the end of the Institute, which was mission-work. But in making these changes he chose from the Rule of St. Ignatius and of other Founders what was more convenient to his own In-

by letters from Archbishop Carlini and Abbot Mechitar who from now onwards, as superior of a Benedictine community took the title of 'Abbot' as he was called for the first time by Mgr. Carlini in his letter to their Eminences the Cardinals of Propaganda, written shortly after Mechitar's profession.

(To the Congregation, 15th Febr. 1712)

Most Eminent and Reverend Sirs, and
most Worshipful Masters,

When I received the Constitutions so longed - for by the Armenian Fathers and transmitted to me by your Eminences, I immediately summoned the Father Abbot who came with two of his religious, and obeying promptly your most prudent injunctions, they made their profession in my hands as subsequently all the others will do, according to the prescribed formula. When they have put all into execution I shall not fail to acquaint Your Eminences, whose sacred purple I kiss.

Rom.ia 9th Nov. 1711. A. D.

I declare myself,
Your 'Eminences'
most humble, devoted and grateful servant,
Bro. Angel Mary, Archbishop of Corinth.

Mechitar also wrote to their Eminences the following letter from himself and his monks:

Most Eminent and Reverend Sirs, and most
Worshipful Masters,

When we received from the most illustrious Archbishop of Corinth the Constitutions which came from your

stitute... .. Among other things he forbade the reception of persons who were not Armenians, a prohibition which he sustained in spite of all representations to receive Europeans.

Eminences as a guide to the monastic life which we have undertaken to lead, we immediately accepted them with all due reverence, determined to observe them minutely. Having been given permission to choose between the rules of SS. Basil, Augustine and Benedict, we chose the last-mentioned unanimously as being known to Armenians for many a century. In the hands of the aforesaid Archbishop, F. John Simon, F. George Casadin and I made our profession publicly according to the prescribed form. The others will do the same in the hands of whomsoever Your Illustrious Lordships will delegate, since the length and the danger of the journey prevent them from going to you. Begging You to continued your esteemed patronage of an abandoned country, and kissing Your Sacred Purple, we declare ourselves.

Modon, 18th Nov. 1711. A. D.

Of Your Eminences

the most humble, devoted and obedient servants,

Mechitar Peter with all the other monks.

These letters were presented to Propaganda on the 15th of February, 1712, and 'the pleasure and edification of their Eminences the Cardinals for the ready and blind obedience of Mechitar were communicated to the Servant of God, in a letter of the Most Eminent Prefect, Card. Sacripante, bearing the date of the 11th of June, 1712, as is to be seen in the Archives of Propaganda.

5. Mechitar now saw the realization of his holy desires. All his efforts, privations, sufferings and persecutions borne with exemplary resignation in the name of God, were now crowned with many blessings by God Himself, who had tried His faithful servant and found him worthy.

A poor youth of Armenia, born among Turks, without means, deprived of all material and moral encouragements, combated by the authorities, betrayed, maltreated and persecuted by his adversaries, harassed by so many maladies, how could he hope that his work would progress with a sure step and be one day confirmed and approved by the Sovereign Pontiff? But strong in the fight, he had an

unshaken confidence in the words which Our Blessed Lady addressed to him in the monastery of Sevan, and those words were for him a star of the sea which amid the stormy waters of life guided him safe to harbour.

Mechitar, prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament, thanked Our Lord from the bottom of his heart, promised anew to be in all things one of His humble servants, confessed that everything was a largess of His immense mercy, and, more with the heart than the lips repeated the words of the Prophet, 'Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy Name be glory, thanks and honour for Thy great mercy and truth'.

CHAPTER IX.

Martyrdom of the priest Ter Comitas. - Other martyrs.

1. Mechitar and Ter Comitas. — 2. The persecution by the Patriarch Avetic continues. — 3. His Vicar, John of Smyrna, a desperate persecutor. — 4. Avetic's deposition and return to power. — 5. The French ambassador against him. — His exile to France and his Catholic death. — 6. The priest Ter Comitas and his holy life. — 7. Accusations against him. - His imprisonment. - His liberation. — 8. God reveals to him his future martyrdom. — 9. Imprisoned again by means of John of Smyrna. — Before the judge. — He is condemned to death. — 10. His martyrdom. — 11. The tomb of the Servant of God. — Numerous miracles through his intercession. — 12. Martyrdom of the priest, Michael of Breknik (Sebaste). — 13. Bishop Melchior of Mardin. - The desire for an Armenian - Catholic Patriarchate frustrated. — 14. Other martyrs and confessors of the Catholic faith.

1. While relating how Our Lord, for His greater glory, crowned the ardent wish of a humble servant of His, Abbot Mechitar, to found a Congregation for the preaching of the Catholic faith, it is impossible not to mention, however briefly, a contemporary of the Servant of God, Ter Comitas of Constantinople, a zealous preacher of the true faith, who by his martyrdom and his blood obtained the glorious crown, and became an intercessor at the throne of the Almighty for the distressed Armenian people, whom even after death he has helped by numerous miracles. Along with Abbot Mechitar and other martyrs and confessors of the Catholic faith, he forms

the brightest glory of the Armenian Catholic Church in the 18th century, by handing down to posterity the example of a genuine faith, deeply felt and well practised, and of a zeal for the salvation of souls above everything else. If their names are not mentioned by historians they are nevertheless written in indelible characters in the *book of life*, and we, without going beyond the margin of brevity determined for our story, believe it a sacred duty to say a little about some of them, and so give an idea of the religious and moral state of a nation which our contemporaries have surnamed 'The Nation of Martyrs'. The massacre of Armenians carried out from the earliest ages until our own day through hatred of their Christian faith, has touched the hearts of all people — but has not moved rulers or governments, personal interest weighing much more with them than any humane consideration, not to speak of the brotherly feelings imposed by Christianity. It is painful, however, to have to say that the shedding of blood and the martyrdom of many Armenian Catholics in the 18th century was instigated, devised and executed by their brothers of the same blood, who, blinded by the spirit of schism, persecuted the Catholic faith and wished all its zealous apostles to be silenced¹.

1. In the *Catholic Echo*, a weekly review (in Armenian) the official organ of the Armenian Catholic Patriarch, Don. Magarian, writing the 'Life of the Servant of God, the priest Ter Comitas', enumerates the powerful champions of Catholicism then in the Turkish capital — Ter Comitas, Marquis Fériol, the French ambassador and others, and then proceeds: 'Among these (was) the great Abbot Mechitar who, after an active and laborious apostolate, succeeded in escaping from the hands of his enemies and fleeing to Smyrna, because Divine Providence had reserved another destiny for him. From Smyrna he corresponded with Ter Comitas, and, as we read in the 'Life' of Abbot Mechitar, the former had firmly decided to enter Mechitar's Congregation, had he not been surprised by martyrdom'. No. 71, p. 674. Nov. 1912. Ed. Constantinople. What a treasure would these letters be, if they were found!

2. In chapter VI we witnessed the persecution raised by the Patriarch Avetic against Armenian Catholics, whom he called *Franks* and whom he represented to the Ottoman government as bound by secret political relations with *Frankish* governments and as rebels to Turkish law. We saw, too, how he succeeded in dislodging from the Capuchin friary the three Catholic priests who had been Mechitar's companions, how he had imprisoned them in the patriarchal palace, with the intention of robbing them first, and then handing them over to the Turkish authorities. But one night the relatives and friends of these priests attacked the prison where they were detained, and a terrible conflict ensued in which the patriarch himself took part. He could not, however, prevent the assailants, strong in numbers and rendered courageous by the justice of the fight, from liberating the trio and sending them off to a safe hiding-place. His Beatitude even received blows from fists and sticks, and his garments were rent in the affray. He thereupon lodged a complaint against the assailants; but the Grand-Vizier, after examining the question, found that the Patriarch had abused his power by imprisoning the priests, without a warrant for arrest from the justiciary; and for this he had Avetic himself arrested. However he let him go in a few days on being bribed with money and presents. But public opinion was by now arraying itself against Avetic as a disturber of the peace, and accusations had reached the Shek-ul-Islam. The patriarch, to appease the ire of the head of the Mahometan religion, went off to Adrianople, the latter's residence, well stocked with rich gifts, and left behind him as his patriarchal vicar the vardapiet, John of Smyrna.

3. The disciple was worse than the master. He set on foot a furious campaign against everything that breathed of Catholicism. He had a number of of devotional books and sermons burnt, such as 'The Imitation of Christ' and 'Christian Meditations', because they smelt, said he, of *Frankish* doctrines. He burnt holy pictures because they had been kiss-

ed by Frankish Catholics, and desecrated altars because on them Frankish priests had celebrated Mass. He forbade the conferring of baptisms, the blessing of marriages, the burial of the dead to all those whom he suspected of being Franks or who did not frequent the Armenian schismatic churches. He busied himself, too, with other irritating schemes of a similar nature. This persecution extended to every diocese of Turkish Armenia and Asia Minor, and its scope was to pocket large sums of money, for many of those who were arrested gave presents and money to Avetic and his vicar in order to be freed.

4. The Patriarch perpetrated all these crimes with impunity. He even succeeded in getting possession of the patriarchate of Jerusalem, for his continual protector was the Shek ul-Islam whom he kept continually supplied with presents. But when the Turkish army revolted and deposed the Sultan Mustafâ, putting up in his place Ahmet on the 10th of August, 1703, and when the Shek ul-Islam was killed, Avetic, who had fled to Constantinople and was living in Scutari, was in an unfortunate situation. The soldiers, knowing him to be a friend of the former Shek, besieged his house, and taking hold of him, put chains on his feet and brought him like an ordinary delinquent to the castle of Yediculê, whence he was released after fifty days and relegated to the island of Avrad. Then the people elected as patriarch the vardapiet Kalust, surnamed the *Thunderbolt*.

But Avetic's partisans did not remain inactive. They worked untiringly and resorted to every possible device to have back their leader. Finally they accused the Patriarch Kalust of being a *Frank* and a *Catholic*, had him deposed after ten months' ruling, and had nominated in his place the vardapiet Nerses, a partisan of Avetic. This was but an expedient to arrive at their real design, and they succeeded, by bribing the Grand-Vizier and promising the nation that Avetic, were he returned to power, would become a peace-maker in these national di-

sturbances and would never again move a persecution against the Catholics.

5. Avetic was recalled from exile and appointed Patriarch. For three months he appeared desirous of peace and did not molest the Catholics, but when he had spent all his money — the accursed fruit of former persecution — and could get no more, he was not ashamed to return to his old machinations, which satisfied at one and the same time his hatred of Catholics and his inordinate love of filthy lucre. So he accused some Armenian gentry of being *Franks* and fined them heavily. Among these there was a person of note who acted as interpreter at the French embassy and so was under the protection of the French ambassador. Monsieur Fériel sent back with threatening words the letter which fined his employee, and the patriarch in reply, through sheer contempt, doubled the fine. It is also said that he intercepted a lettër addressed to the ambassador by his sovereign. The ambassador then accused him before the Grand-Vizier Mohammed Baltagi, of lese-majesty against the King of France and in the form of an ultimatum strongly demanded his severe punishment. The Armenian people were already tired of the ill-treatment they had had to undergo and the lamentations of the oppressed had reached the Sublime Porte in a continuous and heartrending wail; so the Grand-Vizier ordered Avetic to be exiled to the island of Tenedos at the mouth of the Dardanelles. But the ambassador who was diligently defending the rights violated by Avetic and, in a certain sense, by the Turkish authorities too, secretly bought over the exile's guards at Tenedos, had him seized and brought on board a French ship to Marseilles¹.

1. The ambassador Fériel in one of his letters to King Louis XIV, gives an account of Avetic's capture and calls him 'the tyrant of the Latins'. cf. 'Le prétendu masque de fer arménien', by Brousset, pp. 267-8.

The vessel touched at Modon where the great object of Avetic's persecution then happened to be. Then it passed on to Messina where he was kept in chains forty days. Afterwards he was loosed from his bonds and held under strict observation for three months. Finally he was brought to Marseilles, was confined to prison for forty days among criminals, had his beard shaven off as a sign of degradation, as is the custom among Orientals, and then was sent off to Paris and shut up in the Bastille where he died, 11th July 1711. In the last years of his life he embraced the Catholic religion. He was a man of talents, spent his time copying Armenian manuscripts and wrote also his autobiography¹. His death at Paris was preceded by an exemplary Christian life of penance and activity.

6. The disappearance of Avetic did not mean the end of religious disabilities. Avetic's partisans succeeded by offerings of money to have nominated as patriarch, Bishop John of Smyrna, the former vicar, and he renewed the persecution against Catholic Armenians who went to Latin churches, because he saw in this a material loss to himself. He hunted down with peculiar ferocity the vardapiets and priests who with apostolic firmness and intrepidity were defending the Catholic faith.

Among these ministers of the Lord, one was singled out by the people for great veneration on account of his learning, his holy life and the salutary and fruitful effects of his preaching. This was Ter Comitas Keomurgian², chaplain of the Armenian

1. This 'Autobiography' was published by the celebrated French 'Armenist', Ed. Dulorié, in the Armenian newspaper 'Massis' in the year 1874, no. 1489. The historian Tchamtchan whose 'History of the Armenians' was printed in the year 1784, and who certainly never saw Avetic's biography, says that the ex-patriarch became a Capuchin at Marseilles, changed into a lamb, and, weeping over his past life, died a holy death. Vol. III, p. 748.

2. Ter Comitas means Don (or Dom) Comitas. The title

church of Psamatia, an extensive suburb of the Turkish capital.

He was born at Constantinople of a noble family in the year of Our Lord 1656. His father was a priest¹ and was called Ter Mardiros; his mother's name was Juliet. He had an elder brother — the noble Jeremiah Celebi, a famous Armenian writer². In his youth, Ter Comitas was a pupil of Dr. Minas of Antep³, then he specialized in Sacred Scripture. When he had reached the age for receiving the priesthood, he took to wife a very pious lady, named Huri or Mary⁴. He was ordained by Bishop Cyriacus, primate of Eudocia. He was well built, had a noble presence, and was kind to speak to. He had a powerful yet pleasant voice, was gifted with a charming eloquence and was extremely well versed in Holy Scripture. He led a holy and austere life and was respected by his countrymen and by strangers. His way of preaching was so insinuating and fascinating and his words were so sincere and convincing that, when a sermon by him was announced, the church was too small for the crowd that flocked to hear him. Many conversions followed his preaching, especially of Christian families who had embraced Islamism.

Ter meaning Sir or Lord (as in Syriac Mar) is given by the Armenians to priests and prelates.

1. See Appendix IV.

2. The Servant of God, himself, taking into consideration the age in which he lived, was a poet of no mean standing, and a rhymers of prayers and of Sacred Scripture. He wrote also two historical works very much appreciated: 'The fall from the throne of the Sultan Mustafâ', and 'The persecution of the Patriarch John of Smyrna'.

3. For orthography see Appendix II.

4. The Servant of God, Ter Comitas, had seven children — two sons, one of whom, Nahapiet, died in Rome in 1708, the other, John, became an interpreter at Naples; and five daughters, Tartipsha, Hripsima, Soghome, Mariane and Aghavni (Dove).

‘When he sang the Gospel or some other divine book’, writes his contemporary F. Matthew, the famous disciple of Abbot Mechitar, ‘he charmed everyone with his graceful recital. For this gift of his he was invited to preach the Passion every year on Good Friday, and he did it with so much grace that he seemed an angel come down from heaven. With a compassionate heart, tearful eyes and a divine unction he expounded everything as it was required, and the audience, who listened with rapt attention, were moved to compassion and pity for Our Lord and wept aloud. The servant of God was not content with this, but, wishing the tears to bring forth fruit, he sought at the same time to persuade them to do penance for their sins, with convincing arguments drawn from the love of Christ. For this energy of his in preaching and also for his virtuous deeds he was so loved and praised by the people as to be called the Golden-mouthed (Chrysostom) even by the Greeks.

But some brother-priests of his, who had conspired to sow discord and raise a tumult among the people, and who saw that the pacifying conduct of the Servant of God and the people’s great esteem for him were frustrating their malicious designs, conceived the jealousy and hatred of the old serpent against him, and, cherishing these passions, they finally declared open hostilities.

The principal authors of this conspiracy were Ter James, Ter Isaac, Ter Mark and Ter Isaiah. Other priests joined them, but merely in appearance, compelled to do so by the other four. However there was wanting a pretext for attacking the Servant of God, for he was irreproachable before God and man. He was respected equally by the two parties of the nation, Catholics and Armenians, to whom he preached the word of God promiscuously, and like a candle set on a candlestick, he really shone in his holy sacerdotal office¹.

1. F. Matthew of Eudocia, ‘Life and Martyrdom of

He was being searched for to be sent into exile, so he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where, besides venerating the Holy Places and shedding tears and imprinting burning kisses at the Holy Sepulchre, he found means of teaching himself more about the Catholic faith by visiting Latin religious. For this reason he was the object of the persecution of the higher Armenian clergy, among whom was the vardapiet John of Smyrna. From the testimonies of his contemporaries it is known that the Servant of God was always engaged in prayer, that he had the Psalter ever in his hands, that he often fasted, and that in Lent he ate once a day some boiled vegetables and, as is the custom with the Armenians, abstained from fish and oil. His charity to the poor was really brotherly. At the blessing of the houses on the Epiphany and at Easter, he would help poor families, and he, the aristocrat, did not disdain to bring secretly, under his coat, meat to poor invalids. His wife and daughters were examples of modesty and piety.

7. The Servant of God, on returning from his pilgrimage to the Holy City, was stronger still in his convictions as to the truth of the Catholic faith, and so multiplied his zeal and preaching. But his colleagues the other priests accused him before the Patriarch Avetic, who imprisoned him in his palace. Ter Comitas demanded his freedom for the spiritual good of his flock, and this was promised him on condition that he cursed Pope St. Leo and the Council of Chalcedon. The Servant of God indignantly rejected this condition and preferred to remain in

Blessed Ter Comitas'. § 2, 3. Translation taken from the *Summary* for the Cause. (Note that the title 'Blessed' is somewhat premature. He is not beatified yet. I have translated it 'Servant of God' in the above extract (Tr.).) F. Michael C. calls the Servant of God a man of 'holy life, wise and of great erudition'. History of the Armenians. Vol. III, chap. XLIII.

prison; but his relatives, by giving a large sum of money to the Patriarch, succeeded in liberating him.

However the persecution did not cease. Giving way to the entreaties of the Catholics, he kept in hiding for a whole year in the house of a Catholic friend, lest he should be imprisoned anew and thus deprive the faithful of his counsel. During all that time he gave himself up to meditation and to reading, and turned into rhymed verse the 'Acts of the Apostles'.

His enemies, meanwhile, were not inactive. After a thorough search everywhere, they discovered his retreat. They engaged four strong young men who, being promised money, took with them several policemen, attacked the house by night, shattered the doors, entered in, and, binding the hands of the Servant of God, dragged him to prison like an ordinary malefactor. The venerable F. Matthew relates in the Annals of the Congregation that, whilst the four villains were binding Ter Comitas, one of them, named Vodina, more shameless than the rest, gave him a severe blow, but God punished the miscreant for his sacrilege by depriving him of his sight on the spot.

The following day the priests who were Ter Comitas's adversaries aroused the fury of many of the laity against him, that he might be brought before the judge. The latter consented. When the prisoner was led into court, his enemies began to shout out in chorus, 'He is a *Frank* and he publicly asserts it. He helps Franks to escape abroad'. But the mahometan judge appears to have had a heart and some good sense. He insisted on the accusations being explained, and when he saw that they were all on the question of religion, in which matter his tribunal was not competent, he wished to release him. His enemies grew more furious, and shouted at the judge, 'What? Will you free a rebel?' The judge turned to the Servant of God and asked him if he were rebellious to the laws of the Empire. 'I am an Armenian, and an Ottoman subject', he answered. 'Here are documents which testify that I have always paid my taxes as a subject'. The judge

was convinced, and he dismissed his accusers, but he deemed it prudent not to liberate Ter Comitas yet. Four days later, at the request of many of the faithful, he released him with a special rescript and sent him back to his church in company with an eunuch. When the priests saw the eunuch and the rescript, they were afraid, so they embraced Ter Comitas and exteriorly showed him much respect and affection. The people, above all, were very glad to have their good pastor again in their midst, and he resumed his sermons and holy functions, singing hymns with such an angelic voice, that the church of Psamatia was always crowded.

Meanwhile the squabbles and internal contests for the patriarchal see had hushed for the time being the persecution of Catholic Armenians, but when Bishop John of Smyrna succeeded in obtaining this dignity, Catholics had to be prepared to bear up with new troubles and persecutions. This patriarch cordially loathed all Catholics and in particular, Ter Comitas. He was envious of the praises showered on the Servant of God from all sides, especially after his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and long ago had resolved to weaken his influence and avenge the great renown which Ter Comitas enjoyed, and which in his conceit he believed was stolen from his own miserable person. He therefore presented himself before the Grand-Vizier, and, describing in heightend colours how many were *Catholics*, received an order to imprison in the meantime some forty of the Catholic notability.

The Servant of God well knew that his own person was the persecutor's target, and from everywhere he received warnings from his friends that he should take refuge in the French embassy, where he was certain of hospitality. But he thought that his flight would embitter the persecutors more against many of the faithful; moreover it seemed to him that he would be thus acting against the will of God, Who had revealed to him his proximate death, crowned by martyrdom.

F. Matthew relates that he 'went once to Brussa. The bishop of this place was Mgr. Suchias, who in those times was celebrated in the city for his learning and his sermons. He was an upright prelate, wise, attentive to the care of his flock, and a friend of the Servant of God. He had occasion, once, to give a luncheon, and invited Ter Comitas to it, along with many other ecclesiastics and seculars. At such entertainments it is the custom to sing hymns and spiritual canticles relative to the name of each of the guests. When it came to the turn of the Servant of God, they all began to intone the martyrs' hymn. This caused great astonishment to him and to all present for its novelty, and on his asking an explanation from the bishop, he was informed that this did not come by chance, but was a mysterious event, foretelling his approaching martyrdom. He returned to Constantinople and the hour of his combat was certainly drawing nigh.

F. Matthew adds, 'There was in Constantinople a priest named Ter Carapet, pious, faithful, honest, God-fearing and attentive to his duties. He was a great friend of the Servant of God, and they mutually loved one another with a spiritual intimacy, consoled one another and gave one another advice on how to live according to the will of God. They were similar, too, in their habits and their air of sanctity. This Ter Carapet for thirty whole years had suffered and was still suffering with great patience and resignation many kinds of opposition for his sound teaching of the faith. He therefore chose to retire from the world and lived a great time in solitude, shining with holiness and passing his days in the holy contemplation of the divine secrets.....

One time it happened that the Servant of God (Ter Comitas) went to see him, as was his wont, to treat with him on spiritual subjects for the relief of his soul. Their talk was prolonged and darkness came to surprise them. So the Servant of God had to remain overnight there and in his sleep had the following dream: he seemed to see a precious crown

placed on his head, and another on the head of Ter Carapet, but of different colours, his own being red, and his companion's white. On awaking, he began thinking with astonishment at the vision he had had, and in the morning related it to his companion. He too was surprised, but finally he explained to him that the red crown foretold martyrdom, and he counselled him to prepare himself to receive this grace, which Jesus Christ was going to give him. Blessed be the will of God, Who was pleased to grant him such a favour, and to himself a different one! So both of them returned thanks to the Lord, and with words full of unction they consoled one another. Then after mutual embraces of heartfelt affection and after recommending themselves to the grace of the Holy Ghost and to each other's prayers, the Servant of God departed from Ter Carapet and returned home.

It is related also of him that many days before his martyrdom he saw himself in a vision walking with his head in his hands, and not only once but on several occasions had he this vision. He mentioned it to his friend Ter Carapet who unhesitatingly answered that it presaged his martyrdom, and the Servant of God disclosing to him his interior dispositions and his readiness to die, said that if the Lord made him worthy of drinking this chalice, for His name's sake, most willingly would he drink it; and with such readiness of mind did he recommend himself to the grace of our Blessed Saviour every day in his prayers¹.

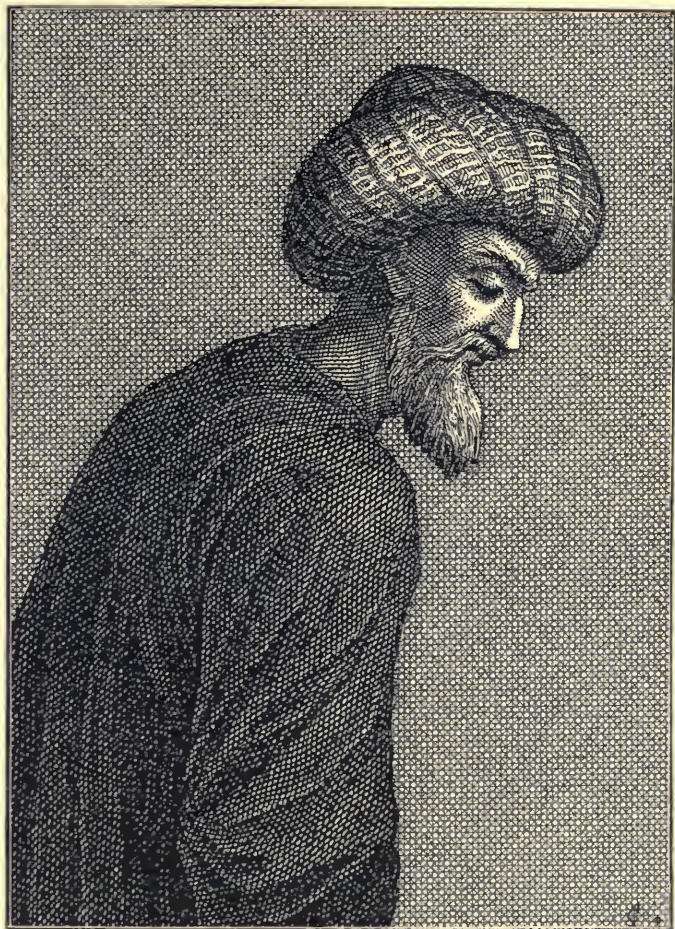
Patriarch John of Smyrna, after procuring the arrest of forty of the principal Catholics, as we saw, prepared the way for the arrest and condemnation of Ter Comitas. The Servant of God, hearing of this plot some days before, and having a presentiment of his approaching end and martyrdom, as he had been warned in these visions, gave himself up wholly

1. F. Matthew, *op. cit.* p. 139-143.

to prayer in his house and thought no more of fleeing elsewhere for safety. On October the 22nd, 1707, a Tuesday, moved by an internal need of being always at peace with his God, he spent the whole day praying. In the evening, three hours after sunset, the crowd of his enemies, priests and laity, with the Patriarch in their midst, presented themselves at his dwelling. They knocked at the door and the Servant of God asked from above whom they sought. This question was as the signal for the fierce and cruel assault. Seeing he was at home, the ruffians forced the door, attacked him furiously and dragged him out violently on all fours, whilst his wife, his sister and his daughters were weeping loudly and beseeching the priests to spare him. He himself asked but one thing, viz, that he might be allowed to enter to dress, but this was denied him. His assailants went inside for his clothes, which he then put on. Meanwhile his Beatitude John of Smyrna went up to him and gave him such a blow on the face as to knock out two of his teeth. Others gave him blows with their fists and their feet, but the Servant of God, imitating the example of the meek and gentle Jesus, kept silent and, bowing low his head, but raising high his thoughts to God, he marched on in front of them¹. Since it was nighttime they could not bring him before the judge, so they confided him to the care of the patriarch's vicar, a priest named Mark, who as a child had been a disciple of the Servant of God but now had become his most deadly enemy, and was one of the four priests mentioned above. The following morning they brought him to the Palace of Justice and there imprisoned him.

Among the prisoners there were others of the notability, such as Bishop Matthew Sari, former

1. From the deposition of Dirazu Malachy Gevahirgy in the *Summary* of the Cause for Ter Comitas's beatification.



The Servant of God, Ter Comitas, before the Turkish judge.
(Taken from an old engraving).

Catholicos of Cilicia and afterwards Patriarch of Constantinople. When these were brought to the place of punishment, they were surrounded by relatives and friends, weeping hysterically and praying them to deny their faith for the present. They held out firmly but trembled when they saw the flash of the death-sword, and these miserable creatures bought their life at the expense of their Christian faith. However, moved afterwards by divine mercy, they sincerely repented and fled to Christian lands to weep over and expiate their great crime. Bishop Mathew Sari even went to Rome, where he led an exemplary life of penance, and died after giving clear proofs of his sincere contrition¹.

On the morning of the 23rd October, Patriarch John, with a mob of three hundred persons whom he made believe that Ter Comitas would not recognise the great Armenian Saint, Gregory the Illuminator, presented himself to the Grand-Vizier, and produced a formal accusation, wherein he also demanded that all those arrested be declared rebels to the laws of the Empire. But the judge wished to proceed regularly, and since the wrath of all was turned in a special way on Ter Comitas, he summoned him to his presence and had the accusations read out.

The Servant of God, with a calmness and meekness proper to victims who are inspired, showed how the charges were unfounded. Well-known Armenian traders were summoned from Galata, who deposed in his favour that he was not a *Frank*. He showed that the accusations had originated in his faith and his religious conduct, and not in rebellion against the State, for he had fulfilled every duty as a subject. The Patriarch insisted that the prisoner was introducing *Frankish* (i. e. *Catholic*) novelties into the Armenian religion.

‘Then the judge asked the Servant of God why then he had left his national religion. He answered

1. Ciamcian (*pronounced Tchamtchan*), History of the Armenians, Vol. III, ch. 43.

that if his enemies had given the judge such an idea of his religion, since they were urged on by spite, they were not in a position to know if what he professed were right and true or not; but that he himself, following in the footsteps of the Holy Armenian Fathers, and consulting the books of his country, well knew what was right. Since he was a priest, so his ministry demanded that, besides being in the right path himself, he should lead his people by the same; and from this path one could not depart as one's whims dictated.

The judge replied that he did not want to hear such sermons, but that Ter Comitas adversaries accused him of teaching pernicious doctrine and of exhorting the people to pass over to the side of the Franks. He added that he was therefore compelled to condemn him to death, as the law prescribed against the turbulent and the seditious. These and similar things the judge said to him.

The Servant of God answered that the judge would be conferring a particular favour on him, if he did so, once he himself were in conscience sure that he was free from such a crime as his enemies imputed to him. If he were judged for his religion, he let His Highness know that he had no right to decree sentence of death against him for the faith he professed, for its examination did not fall to the lot of one who did not profess it, and from whom it was as far distant as heaven from earth. If, however, trampling on laws and obligations, he was prepared to condemn him to death, as he could, he (Ter Comitas) would seek his own blood back from his impious hands at the tremendous judgment of a Just God.

The judge, dismayed at such threats, stood up in a great rage and asked John of Smyrna who was responsible for the blood of this man. He and his followers answered that they were, provided the judge removed him. Sitting down again, he told the Servant of God that he must seek his blood from them, because they presented him as worthy of

death for introducing novelties into the Christian religion''.

Then Ter Comitas humbly asked the judge, 'Sir, tell me, which of these two religions do you prefer. — The Armenian or the Frank?' The judge answered, 'Both of them are for me equally contemptible'. Then said the other, 'What does it matter to you whether I am of the Armenian or the Frankish religion?' The tribunal found his argument very reasonable and his words full of wisdom. The jurists in the court talked among themselves and concluded that he could not be condemned, and that it was but just to let him go. Meanwhile the judge was called away by the Sultan and so no decision was come to. The Servant of God was led back to prison where he knelt down and poured forth fervent prayers to God.

He was always conscious of his imminent martyrdom, and never lost his calmness of mind and serenity of countenance. He prayed the whole night of the 24th with burning sighs that in all things the will of the Lord might be accomplished. Then he called to his side a Catholic priest, arrested like himself for the *Frankish* faith, by name Ter Carapet (different from his friend of the same name), and though his conscience was clear and at peace, he humbly made his confession and fortified himself with the Body and the Blood of our Lord. Immediately he felt a heavenly strength and joy pervade his whole person and gladly he thanked his Saviour who thus made him taste beforehand the approaching delights of heaven. His enemies had been busy and took no rest that night, and what they could not obtain by justice, they procured with money.

On the morning of the 25th October, a Saturday, the judge summoned him again, and the accusations of the preceding day were repeated. But a fresh one was added, viz, that he transported to

1. F. Matthew, op. cit, chap. X, XI.

Frankish lands Christians who had become Mahometans. This last charge aroused, as was to be expected, a general burst of indignation and confused yells among the fanatical Turks, and the judge, bought over with gold and corrupted with presents, profited by the excitement of the moment and hastened to pronounce sentence of death.

10. The Servant of God, on hearing the condemnation, turned to the judge, and with a firm and solemn voice, said, 'You have condemned me to death on unjust charges, and you will be responsible for my blood before God on the last day, at the true and general judgement'. At these words the judge became affrighted, hesitated and felt remorse. But the enemies of the martyr, fearing that under the weight of this remorse and fear he would revoke the sentence, surrounded him, repeated the shout of 'His blood be on us' as was proclaimed by the murderers of the Just One, and reanimated the cowardly judge by crying out that they assumed the responsibility before God of this sentence.

This new Pilate told the guards to lead the condemned man away. They bound his hands to his shoulders, along with two lay-persons also condemned to death for the Catholic religion, and marched off to Parmak-Capu, the place of punishment. An enormous crowd of every nationality followed, among whom was the zealous missionary F. Elias, Mechitar's disciple, who did not go for mere curiosity's sake, but to fulfil his office as a priest, were it necessary, for he was known to Ter Comitas. He was thus an eye-witness of the whole proceedings, related it afterwards at St. Lazarus and so it could be copied down by the chronicler, Father Matthew. The Servant of God was soon followed close by his weeping spouse, and sister and daughters. His wife, a strong soul well nourished with the faith, a second St. Anatolia, encouraged, her husband like her

saintly patroness not to deny the faith, nor to think of her or his daughters for whom the good God would provide¹. His daughters were in tears, and dared not — nay, could not — say a word. Only his sister, moved by a misguided affection, prayed him through her sobs to deny the faith exteriorly and temporarily in order to save his life, for there would be time later to repent of his passing fault. The Servant of God blessed them and encouraged them all, and with an erect figure and ever serene countenance, continued his pace, reciting the 118th Psalm, ‘Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord’. The last to tempt him was the executioner, who had been promised money by the judge, again repentant, if he succeeded in making him deny the faith. This mercenary did all he could with the Servant of God, kissed his beard after the Oriental fashion, reminded him of his wife, his daughters and his own youthful years, put before him the image of dazzling riches and honours, but the Servant of God only answered by making a profession of faith and reciting the Gospel according to St. John. F. Matthew’s narration here continues (Chap. XX.), ‘When they had all reached the appointed place, the Servant of God had come to the words ‘And the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us’. Having recited them, he began to exhort his two companions for the last time to take up courage and be strong and faithful to Christ to the last, in order to obtain the eternal crown. He bade them not be afraid of the sight of the sword, for it could only frighten them for a short time and then, opening up an outlet for their free spirit, enclosed in and subject to the body, would transport them alive to eternal life. He told them that he would precede them, a holocaust for the faith on the altar of his love and his blood, that he would be an example to them, that they, too, following intrepidly

1. F. Matthew, *op. cit.*, Chap. XVIII.

in his footsteps, might gain with him the never-fading crown of heaven. Thus he spoke, and making the sign of the cross on the place of execution with his foot (for his hands were bound), he knelt down on it facing towards the east. The executioner bade him turned towards the south, which was the direction of Mecca, the Holy City of the Mahometans, but he answered, "This is my South,,"

Meanwhile the same executioner who had before tempted him, though in vain, turned to the assault again and tried to move him from his resolution, pretending with diabolical deceit to be anxious for his well-being, and bidding him take compassion on himself, for he was the father of a family and he would thus save himself and it this loss. He exhorted him to become a Mahometan in order to escape death, just as the Patriarch Matthew Sari had done and had been covered with honours and wealth. Then the Servant of God, forearmed with the invincible arms of the true faith, strengthened and fired by the grace of the Holy Ghost, frankly told the executioners not to tire themselves out for nothing, not to waste time in useless talk, but to do what they had been ordered, for, even if they were to cut his bones into pieces, he would willingly submit to such a martyrdom rather than deny Jesus Christ. On hearing this the executioner went into a rage, and, while the Servant of God was still reciting the confession of his faith, he cut off his head with a sword. Thus was martyred the priest, Ter Comitas. It was Saturday, the 25th of the month of October, in the year 1156 of the Armenian era¹, and 1707 from the Incarnation'.

Many Christians, Armenians, Greeks and Latins, who had hastened to the dreadful yet glorious spectacle, dipped their handkerchiefs in his blood which was spilt on the ground. F. Elias did the same, and everyone tried his best to get also a drop of his holy blood. Others bought portions of his holy dress

1. See Appendix VI.

from the executioners and kept them as treasures. Among these was Mechitar's disciple who sent the garments thus obtained to St. Lazarus, island, they are religiously preserved.

When the Saint's body fell to the ground, according to indubitable testimonies, a supernatural fragrance pervaded the atmosphere, and the following night at eight o'clock, a great light came down from heaven over his body and was so dazzling that all who saw were thunderstruck.

His two companions, encouraged by his words, resisted the seductions of the Mahometans until the last moment, but when they saw his head fall, they fainted away and were dressed by the Turks in their garb, as a sign of their defection. When they returned to consciousness they made no protestation, but we know that, repentant in heart, they passed to Christian lands and led a life of reparation.

11. 'The body of the Servant of God remained unburied at the same spot where he was beheaded, because, according to the custom of the country and the orders of the judges, the bodies of all those who were executed had to remain unburied for three long days. Several wonderful things took place on this occasion.

For three months it had not rained, though some clouds had appeared in the sky, but on the martyrdom of Ter Comitas, it began to rain and continued raining for three days. However it always dropped lightly on the body of the Servant of God, so that it neither suffered in colour nor in anything else, but, on the contrary, bore a whiteness like snow and emitted a heavenly fragrance. Two Greek priests and others of different nationalities attested also on oath that they saw it clearly at night-time surrounded by a light come down from heaven.

'When the three days were about up, Ter Comitas's enemies approached the Minister offering him presents and asking him not to permit the burial of the Servant of God, but to order that his body be cast into the sea, as was customary in the case of criminals, lest the people give it the honour and

cult of a martyr; the Minister however rejected their plea, and yielding to the entreaties of the household¹ of the Servant of God, gave them permission to remove the body and bury it as usual, because, as we have heard², the Minister, after condemning him, saw in a dream the Servant of God laying hands on him self and bringing him to justice as he had threatened to do. Terrified by this dream, he went about for several days trembling lest some calamity should befall him.

When the corpse was to be buried, there was no Armenian priest bold enough to accompany it to the grave, for they were all afraid of the Patriarch John of Smyrna. Only lay-persons, then, went with it, and they were compelled to seize the bier from the cemetery by force, for the custodian was afraid to part with it³. When the Greek Patriarch heard this, he bade his metropolitans and clergy go and bury it, and they came with incense, candles and other ornaments of their church, and performed the exequies with psalms, hymns and harmonious chants. They then formed in procession and accompanied the corpse to the Armenians' cemetery, where they interred it in the family-vault, to the glory of Jesus Christ, our Lord. The head of the Servant of God was taken by the Greeks and placed in their church. The French ambassador by means of presents given to the custodian of that gate of the city which is near the Armenians' cemetery, dug up from the grave the inestimable treasure and the precious relic of

1. In the first Process of Beatification some witness deposed that it was the dead person's mother-in-law who approached the minister. Another affirmed that it was his younger daughter, sixteen years old. F. Matthew, in writing down 'household' certainly means 'relatives'.

2. Note that it is still the chronicler who is writing. (Tr.).

3. It was not customary in those days to bury dead in coffins. They were carried to the grave unenclosed, on the top of a framework (bier) kept for the purpose. Hence the allusion. (Tr).

Ter Comitas' body, took his head from the Greeks, giving offerings to their church instead, and sent it to France, where until to-day it is preserved with all off great honour. People go to venerate his sacred relics with great confidence, and obtain from God their requests, through the intercession of the glorious martyr and priest Comitas, to the glory of the same God and the honour of His martyr''.



Tomb of Ter Comitas.

1. F. Matthew, *ibid.* chap. XXI, XXII. The French ambassador who took the body of the Servant of God, was the ever fearless and fervent catholic, Marquis Fériol, who had it conveyed to Lyons. When F. Michael Ciamciam was composing his 'History' the body was still there, as he attests in the 3rd volume, chap XLIII, § 5. All trace of it was lost after the Great French Revolution (1791), in which so many relics disappeared and so many tombs, especially of kings or princes, were destroyed. (The words 'until this day' refer to the time of F. Matthew, viz, about the year 1750). (Tr.)

The simple tomb made for him at first, was ornamented and embellished a few years later by a touching epitaph, from the pen of some unknown but inspired poet, perhaps of some relative, because in it there vibrates a chord of real feeling. Similarly an old national tradition attributes to a princess, sister of the valiant martyr, Vahan di Cogtan (A. D. 737) that stupendous, angelic and emotional hymn in honour of her young and noble brother, sovereign of Cogtan.

The epitaph on the tomb of the Servant of God, Ter Comitas, full of the same high and moving sentiments, runs as follows:

'This is the casket which contains Blessed Ter Chomitas, a minister of the altar, a priest of the great family of Keomurgian, and a citizen of Byzantium.

The venerable Chomitas had a knightly¹ name. He was erect in stature, joyful in countenance, renowned in oratory, wise of mind, and a composer of poems in running verse.

The venerable Chomitas, the learned poet, was of unsullied character, was baptized with the cross, and drunk the chalice, foretelling his own death by the shedding of his blood.

The venerable Chomitas, the valiant athlete, betrayed to princes for his faith, was condemned as guilty, and demanded his blood from the judge.

The venerable Chomitas, propitius to the Armenians, was decapitated in Parmak-Kapu, in the district of Bazajet², on the feast of St. Demetrius³, and on the following Monday was placed in this coffin.

1. There is a play on the words of the Latin inscription, Chomitas — cometale (Tr).

2. Not quite correct; Parmak-Kapu and Bazajet are two distinct suburbs of Constantinople (Tr).

3. St. Demetrius is a martyr greatly honoured by Orientals and called by the Greeks 'Megalomartyr'. He is said to have, by the sign of the cross, given victory to a

The venerable Chomitas, famous martyr, worked many miracles which are guaranteed by the number of pilgrims who flock daily to his tomb.

The venerable Chomitas, martyr worthy of all praise, was put to death in the year of the Lord, 1707, and in the year of the Armenians, 1156, on the 26th of October.

6. Chomitas Martyr, first-born of the light, receive the prayers of thy panegyrist along with those of thy many suppliants!

To the sacred spot of his martyrdom many pilgrims travel, and every year on his anniversary, the Catholic Armenian clergy go to sing High Mass there; and God glorifies his Servant with a series of innumerable miracles, as all the inhabitants of Constantinople testify.

The disciples of Abbot Mechitar who were in the East did their best to procure relics of the Servant of God, and these are now religiously kept in a prepared receptacle in the Abbot General's room. They consist of a piece of a handkerchief dipped in the martyr's blood by F. Elias who was present; his cloak which F. Emmanuel, another of the Abbot's missionaries in the East, bought from Ter Comitas' relations, and sent to Venice by another Father, the year following the martyrdom (1708); other portions of the garments of the Servant of God; his seal; several manuscripts in prose and verse; prayer-books of St. Nerses of Naregh and St. Nerses of Lambron, belonging to him.

The martyrdom of Ter Comitas made every Catholic country in East and West exult with joy, and Pope Clement XI and Cardinal Sacripante asked for official reports of the matter from the French ambassador, Marquis de Fériel and the superiors of

another martyr, Nestor, in a contest between the latter and a giant named Lyeus, and for this was speared to death by the command of the great persecutor, Maximinian, in the 1st half of the 4th century (Tr).

the various religious missions. The first postulatory letter for the introduction of the Cause of Beatification of the Servant of God, is from Vincent Mary Colomati, of the Friars Preachers, a missionary and vicar-general of his Order in the Levant in the years 1775-99, who resided at St. Peter's in Galata, Constantinople.

12. The persecutions set on foot by John of Smyrna and some of his successors gave to the Church more martyrs and renowned confessors of the faith. We have related the martyrdom of Ter Comitas, since it was closely connected with Mechitar's person and the history of his Congregation. We shall add a brief account of the rest, merely to give an exact idea of the conditions in which Mechitar's missionaries then found themselves in the East.

In the same year as Ter Comitas shed his blood for the Catholic faith (1707), another priest, Ter Michael from a village near Sebaste, was martyred at Sebaste. He was arrested at the instigation of his schismatical countrymen, thrown into prison as a *Frank* and a rebel, and as such was condemned to the gibbet. He was exhorted by the Turkish authorities and by the people to deny the Catholic faith and save his life so dear and precious to his family, but his only answer was his profession of faith. When they were passing the cord round his neck to hang him, he said nothing but 'Jesus, Mary', and at his last breath on the scaffold these most sweet and holy names were again heard — to the pride of the Catholics, the edification and wonder of the other Christians and the shame of his murderers.

13. Meanwhile in the government spheres of the Turkish capital these religious persecutions made the authorities apprehensive, for they justified western intervention and threatened dangerous complications. The majority of the Armenians were weary and disgusted. So the Patriarch John was deposed as being a restless personage and the cause of all these disturbances, and in his place was elected, a certain vardapiet named Isaac, a meek, person and of good disposition.

The Catholic Armenians, who had always been crushed under a load of persecutions, proscriptions and death itself, hastened in crowds to the Grand-Vizier, and protesting their fealty to the Sultan, begged of him to put an end to these vexations of 'the subjects of the Great Lord'¹. Thereupon the Grand-Vizier ordered the Patriarch never to denounce again his people as rebels. But this lasted but a short time, because the Patriarch Isaac was accused of being a *Frank* and was deposed by his ambitious enemies.

His successor, John of Canzac, returned to the old custom of persecuting, because the majority of the Armenian Catholics went to Latin Churches or had Holy Mass celebrated in their own homes. He repaired to the Latin Vicar-Apostolic to urge the Armenians to attend their national churches, but getting no answer, he presented himself before the Grand-Vizier, who would not listen to such an accusation.

The Catholic Armenian clergy, encouraged by the good dispositions of the Vizier and trusting in his ephemeral benevolence, believed they could succeed in putting a stop to this persecution of a century and in having at last a Church and a Patriarch of their own. Along with some of the principal laymen they met in council at the palace of the Vicar-Apostolic and then elsewhere, with Bishop Melchior of Mardin at the head of their just aspirations. They secretly formed, also, a commission for the purpose of collecting funds to bend Turkish heads and face the other expenses of the undertaking.

Meanwhile Patriarch John of Canzac got on the scent of this secret agitation and made it known to the Grand Vizier, representing it as a dangerous act of rebellion and lese-majesty. The latter's zeal in the matter was too sudden and excessive. He had three bishops Sergius, John and Jeremias, arrested

1. i. e. the Sultan.

secretly, believing them to be the ringleaders of the movement. Then Bishop Melchior held a meeting and it was decided that more than one hundred of the notables should present themselves before the Grand-Vizier and protest against the arrest of the three bishops brought about by the patriarch's scheming. He received them, bade them write their names, and then asked that Bishop Melchior and two vardapiets who were the most active and the most expert in the matter, should come to him. The Catholic representatives guaranteed that they would come and then forced them to appear before him.

When they came into the presence of the Turkish functionary, he sent for the other three bishops to be released from prison. While they were being brought to the Grand-Vizier, two of them, thinking they were being brought to punishment, accepted Mahometanism. The third, who was Bishop John, came to the Vizier, who, after murmuring a few words of accusation, sent him and Bishop Melchior and the two vardapiets to hard labour, whence only Bishop John could free himself, on the payment of large sums of money. The other three patiently suffered all their vexations and died firm in the Catholic faith.

14. The patriarch, encouraged by this success, asked for and obtained a edict against all those prelates who were suspected of being Catholics, as supporters of the separation contemplated by the Bishop Mardin. Several were imprisoned. Among them was Bishop Abraham of Aleppo, on a mission to Trebizond on behalf of the Catholic religion. He was a warm friend and admirer of Abbot Mechitar and with his subjects wished to put himself under Mechitar's obedience, when he was created Catholicos of Cilicia for all the Armenian Catholics, by Pope Benedict XIV in 1742. He was arrested at Trebizond during his apostolate, was bound in fetters and put on board ship on the 14th of August, 1715, and in the first days of October arrived at Constantinople, where he was imprisoned.

Many distinguished persons, vardapiets and priests were arrested in various cities, above all, in Eudocia and Erzerum, where a vardapiet, named Khatchatur, put several hundreds in prison and then liberated them, receiving a great deal of money for their ransom.

The prisons and galleys were teeming with Armenian Catholics and many of these humble confessors of the faith died a martyr's death refusing with firmness and dignity the flattering proposals of the Turks who endeavoured to shake their constancy with representations of false grandeur, were they to embrace the Mahometan religion.

Let these few lines suffice, for the glory of God and the honour of the Armenian Catholic community, to give a clearer idea of the state of the Armenian Church at the beginning of the 18th century under Ottoman rule, when the missionaries of Mechitar went to preach, comfort and strengthen the Armenian Catholics in the faith. This holy zeal of theirs is attested by numerous letters of unbounded gratitude and continual demands for missionaries, written to that venerable Abbot who had endured so much to found his Congregation.

CHAPTER X.

The Mechitarian Community of Modon in the missions.

1. On the Constitution being approved, hostilities break out in the East. — 2. Entreaties from various cities for missionaries. — 3. The esteem of Latin religious in the Levant for Abbot Mechitar and his missionaries. — 4. Accusations against F. Elias. — Mechitar recalls him to Modon. — 5. Mechitar defends him before the Holy See. — Splendid testimony of the Archbishop of Corinth. — 6. Progress of the new Community spiritually and intellectually. — Reading of Sacred Scripture above all things. — 8. Rumours of war in the Peloponnesus between the Turks and the Republic of Venice. — 9. Mechitar decides to take refuge in Venice. — Sorrowful separation. — 10. Arrival at Venice and precarious habitation.

1. The approbation granted by Pope Clement XI to Mechitar's new Congregation established at Modon, aroused the envy and opposition, chiefly in Constantinople, of some Armenian ecclesiastics who could not bear the sight of a Catholic Congregation of Armenian nationality. Since these latter had pursued their studies in the Propaganda College, Rome, this new Community in the Orient, this change of method in ecclesiastical studies, the reading of the Armenian Fathers, their testimonies in doctrinal matters appeared a deviation from the system introduced by the *Unifiers*, who in everything had recourse to Latin theologians and so thought this interest in national writers rather dangerous. If we add to this the great esteem and respect which the people felt

for the new preachers from the Modon school, for their exemplary life, their unwearying, apostolic zeal, their disinterestedness and self-denial in all their sacred ministrations, we shall soon find the cause of such envy and so many accusations.

2. However in all the Armenian cities where this western element was not to be found it is the Armenian Catholic clergy themselves who resort in a body to Mechitar, to have one of his missionaries to preach and confess. From among so many letters let us quote but one written by the priests of Trebizond in the year 1713.

To the Most Blessed, the Most Happy, the Most Illustrious, the Most Reverend and Most Virtuous Abbot, Mr. Mechitar, Doctor in Sacred Theology, and to the Vardapiets, your monks and colleagues, greeting.

After words of anxiety and respect, after kissing your sacred right hand — distributor of divine things, we manifest our condition to you and we implore God to give you many years of good health for the glory of Holy Church and the good of our nation. We ask also that you would deign to remember us, the last of your servants, who are situated in the maritime city of Pontus and are like a flock of sheep without a shepherd, for, though by the will and power of God and by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, our church is governed aright, since blasphemies and names of heretics were removed long ago from Holy Mass and our Mass is now celebrated in a Catholic manner, nevertheless send us a good pastor who may admonish us by word of mouth... .. We beseech you, Most Illustrious Sir, not to reject our entreaty, and as soon as this letter reaches you be so good as to send us one of your companions... .. Enough.

Fare well in the Lord, for the welfare of our country. Amen.

It was written in Trebizond, on the 9th of September, in the year of the Armenians¹ 1162 (1713).

Your Most Illustrious Lordship's
Most humble Servants of Pontus,

1. See Appendix VI.

(L. S.)	The	Servant	of	Christ	Ter	Paschal
"	"	"	"	"	Ter	Vartan
"	"	"	"	"	Ter	Avedic
"	"	"	"	"	Ter	Cyril

3. What estimation the Latin religious of the East had for Mechitar and his monks, may be gathered from a pile of letters sent to him by them. We shall transcribe but one, written by the Jesuit superior at Smyrna.

Most Rev. Sir and my Most Worshipful Master
in Christ,

I come with this my most obsequious (letter) to humbly pay my respects to your Most Rev. Lordship and to recommend myself and all the priests of this mission to your prayers in the Most Holy Sacrifice. To my great joy I see that the Rev. Father, who is the bearer of this letter and was ransomed at Constantinople, has safely left this city. He has edified us greatly by his holy labours and preached two grand sermons in our church; one was in Armenian, the other in Turkish. They were accompanied with great applause and produced much fruit. I pray the great and holy God to give strength to you, Most Rev Sir, to form many more valiant missionaries for the greater glory of God and the good of souls. *May they increase by thousands of thousands.* I offer you my humble services here and declare myself with all respect,

Smyrna, 2nd Feb. 1716,

Your Most Illustrious Lordship's
Most humble and grateful Servant,
Adrian Verzeau, Superior of the
Society of Jesus at Smyrna.

4. In the year 1712 the zealous, learned and prudent missionary of Mechitar, F. Elias was at Constantinople. He was one of the pillars of the new Community, loved and respected by the people for his fervent sermons, his stainless life and his charity towards the needy and the afflicted. The people's unbounded esteem and their numerous concourse on every occasion to listen to his inspired words, were

the cause of envy, and his enemies studied every means of keeping the people away. They did not even hesitate at false accusations, first among which was the terrible one, that F. Elias had spoken against indulgences. The instigators of the plot were of the Armenian clergy. They accused him to the Vicar-Apostolic who in turn wrote to Propaganda. Then the Prefect of this Sacred Congregation ordered Abbot Mechitar to recall F. Elias from the East.

Try to imagine the bleeding wound made in Mechitar's heart when he saw such a blow fall on the institution which had scarcely been approved, and undoubtedly in the most authoritative and most respected person after the Abbot. He immediately wrote to F. Elias, telling him to come back without delay to Modon and postponed to some other occasion the defence of his missionary. This unexpected recall, and, above all, the reason of it sorely wounded F. Elias who thus lost his reputation as a preacher of holy truth. Nevertheless he, too, humbly bowed his head, and left Constantinople on the spot. He was accompanied to the quay by almost the entire Armenian Catholic population, many of whom were weeping, for they felt deeply the loss of such a father, such a preacher and such a confessor, as is seen in the written testimonies left. The adversaries of Mechitar's Community at Modon then spread the calumny everywhere that this society was now dispersed and that henceforward no member of that Congregation would be seen in the East.

On F. Elias's arrival at Modon, Abbot Mechitar immediately wrote to Propaganda showing the falsity of the accusations and forwarding the written attestations which had come from the scenes of his missionary's apostolate. But the solemn defence of Mechitar and his monks was taken up by their Ordinary, the Archbishop of Corinth, Mgr. Angel Mary Carlini, a Dominican, who in his letter calls Mechitar the *Driver away of heresy*, a title given to St. Athanasius in the first Christian centuries. Here is the stupendous letter in its integrity:

Brother Angel Mary Carlini, of the Order of Friars Preachers, by divine mercy Archbishop of Corinth and Administrator of the Peloponnesian Kingdom, etc, etc, etc.

To all who shall read this letter we hereby testify that the Most Rev. Father Mechitar Peter, Abbot of the monastery of St. Anthony of the Armenians at Modon, and subject to our administration, who is about to depart from hence to Venice, during his stay of thirteen years here in the Peloponnesian Kingdom, by his upright character, his blameless life and his meritorious virtue, has given an example of great edification and piety, and by his labour, vigilance and solicitude has laudably fulfilled his Abbatial duties.

He was the promotor of the monastery, built it from its foundations along with the church and completed the work. He gathered together from Armenia pious young men of good promise, instructed them in Catholic dogma and the rules of his Order and enrolled twenty of them in the monastery. He was a resolute supporter of the Catholic faith against heretical degeneracy, and several of his monks whom by his word and example he had prepared to work for the greater good of souls, he sent back to Armenia. In all things which were for the greater glory and honour of God or the proper discipline of his monks in their work for the good of the faithful, his conduct left nothing to be desired. He therefore asked and deserved this commendatory letter, and by it we represent him to all Illustrious Ordinaries of those places where he may happen to be, as worthy of all confidence.

In testimony of which, etc.

Nauplia, from our Archiepiscopal Chancery,

15th March, 1715 A. D.

(L: S.) Bro. A. M. Archb. etc.

James Bolis, Vice-Chancellor.

Meanwhile, while the enemy was spreading the false report that the Mechitarian Congregation was dispersed and its members forbidden to preach, Mechitar sent to Constantinople F. Paul, a prudent man and very zealous for the Catholic religion, around whom soon flocked the Armenian Catholics.

6. All the misfortunes, persecutions, vexations and other exterior changes did not turn the Servant of God for one minute from his zeal and care for the spiritual welfare of his new Congregation. Side by side with the progress in spiritual life and monastic discipline, their studies advanced too, along several lines. The highest class had finished their philosophy course and were to begin dogmatic theology, but there was no text-book in Armenian. Mechitar, a great admirer of the angelic St. Thomas of Aquin — the inexhaustible treasure and unfailing light of truth, whose splendour and richness increase as years go by, and a copy of whose 'Summa Theologica' F. John had brought from Rome, thought of choosing it as a text-book for his clerics. But it had to be translated and it was no easy matter to find corresponding expressions for the deep and subtle thought of Aquinas. Before girding himself to the task, Mechitar withdrew for some time from all exterior occupations, prayed long and fervently to the God of knowledge, and gave himself up wholly to the study of the linguistic subtleties of scholastic theology. In this arduous work he was greatly helped by F. John, who had been six years in Rome and had become familiar with the Latin language. He translated first, then the Abbot confronted the Armenian version with the Latin original and exchanged for difficult expressions more correct Armenian phrases. Gradually, as the translation proceeded, copies were made and were handed to the young students, and Mechitar with his penetrating mind and vast erudition explained the theological soarings of the great Angel of the Schools.

7. At the same time the venerated Abbot gave lessons in the other classes — history, mathematics and philosophy according to the methods of the time, and the text-books, written by him in Armenian are still extant. Each day he had three or four classes, then he gave public and private spiritual exhortations, watched over the discipline, prepared text-books, attended the administration, visited the buildings in course of construction, prepared priests

spatched with his own hand correspondence to Rome, Constantinople and Asia Minor, and in his free moments read the Fathers or the Holy Scripture, because the latter was to dominate everything. Once he observed that one of his clerics was giving too much attention to philosophy and philology, and fearing lest the fervour of his piety should on that account cool, he gathered all his disciples together in a room and sitting down at a little table in front of them, he addressed those present in an inspired allocution, saying that at their study-desks the Holy Scriptures and the Imitation of Christ should be on their right hand and their text-books of theology on their left, because over every science and every study the love of God and piety should preside, all other studies being but auxiliaries of the highest of all sciences.

8. Notwithstanding all this labour he found time to look after and ameliorate the economical status of his small Community. He had a great number of vines planted and two thousand olive-trees, which began to produce so much that by the beginning of the year 1714, from the income of these plantations, he was enabled not only to pay off old debts, but to ornament the church and help the poor.

He was thus beginning to breathe peacefully and contentedly, since, free from pecuniary difficulties he could give himself up to the instruction of his young pupils, when a thunderbolt, the forerunner of a storm, burst in the clear sky, announcing a war in the near future between the Turks and the Venetian Republic and the taking away from the Most Serene of the dominion of the Morea.

Mechitar, after hearing from the governor himself the confirmation of this grave and sad news, returned home and in great sorrow and vexation retired to the church which was the living testimony of his work and his aspirations, threw himself down before the altar of the Blessed Virgin and ardently besought her to grant him light and support in these straits. He well knew Turkey's power and the strength of her soldiers' attacks, and he had grave

doubts in a victory for his beloved Venetians. Then what would become of the small new Community which possessed but one house, if it fell under the fierce tyranny of the Turk? Where could it flee for refuge? He gathered his companions together, explained everything to them and asked their advice. After weighing well all considerations they unanimously decided to leave Modon provisionally and go to Venice, the capital of the Republic and a very secure city, where there was, too, a numerous Armenian colony with a church named *Holy Cross*. In the month of December he brought his nine clerics to Nauplia, where Mgr. Carlini, bishop of Corinth, ordained them priests. He then went to pay his respects to the governor, who gave permission for the Congregation to seek shelter in Venice, but obliged him leave at Modon, as Mechitar wished too, some priests to officiate in church and look after the monastery.

9. Returning to Modon, the Servant of God took counsel with the elder fathers to decide who was to stay, and it was agreed that F. Lazarus of Aghin should remain with the title and office of Pro-Abbot. Three priests and three lay-brothers¹ were given him as companions and all were very glad to be left, for thus they were imperilling their lives for holy obedience's sake and for the glory of God's house.

Abbot Mechitar, after providing for all necessities like a prudent and shrewd father of a family who is about to be separated from his beloved sons, gave his last orders and gathered all his disciples into church. There on his knees before the altar of the Madonna, the Servant of God, as during the persecution at Constantinople, so now, with tears in his eyes placed his Congregation under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and consigned to her the children he was leaving behind him, confiding them in all things to her maternal care and to the intercession of St. Anthony the Abbot.

1. The *Catholic Encyclopaedia* says he left seventy companions. *Seven* would have been nearer the mark (Tr.).

Then he said good-bye to the seven who were remaining as administrators and custodians of that house and church, built at the cost of so many sacrifices, and with the other eleven he departed a-



The City of Venice (Riva degli Schiavoni).

midst deep and silent tears which welled up from their heart and testified to the bitterness of parting. At the quay he embarked on a ship bound for Venice, having but two hundred and fifty piastres in his pocket along with the food for the journey. He had

lived in the Morea twelve years. It was now the month of March 1715.

Mechitar while still young had left his parents, relatives and native land but he never felt the pang of separation so keenly as now, and leaving his companions, his monastery and his church which with so much labour and love he had seen rise towards heaven, he shed burning tears. Then he resigned himself to the superior will of Him, Who was moving all, strengthened himself with the holy thought of sacrifice and consoled all with the assurance that the Blessed Virgin would never abandon her children.

Amidst the immensities of sea and sky, seated majestically in the ship, his gaze fixed on the billows, he meditated on the ship of his spiritual life and of that of the rest whom he had assumed the duty and responsibility of conducting to the harbour of heaven through the storms and painful opposition of this weary existence.

10. After a month's sail on a calm sea, they arrived at Alberoni, near Venice, without accidents or dangers of any description, though their vessel was out of order. After the customary quarantine, they went to live in the city near the church of St. Martin, renting a little house for seventy-two piastres a year. Mechitar had no means of maintaining the community, having provided the monastery at Modon with almost all he had. Through acquaintances in the Morea he obtained permission for five of his fathers to go and say Mass in the various parishes and with the stipends thus received he had to procure food and clothing and meet other needs. So it was that poverty with all its difficulties had come back among the members of the Congregation.

These eleven were joined in October by two other priests from the Morea, who, when Nauplia fell into the hands of the Turks, were advised by the governor to leave Modon for Venice. But about this interesting event, in which the Servant of God lost his church, monastery and grounds, we shall speak in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

Turco-Venetian War. — Modon destroyed by the Turks.

1. The Cause of the war. — 2. The Turkish army in the Morea. — The fall of Corinth. — 3. The taking of Nauplia. — Sacking. — Massacres. — 4. Modon besieged. — Resistance of the Venetians. — Modon taken and destroyed. — Massacres. — 5. Mechitar's disciples taken slaves. — Ransomed in Constantinople by friends of the Congregation. — Their arrival in Venice. — 6. Eagerness of the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda to assist them. — His letter to the Patriarch of Venice. — 7. Assistance given by the Venetian clergy and patriciate.

1. The causes of the rupture and the consequent war between the Turks and the Venetians, were, according to Turkish historians, fourteen, and they were intimated to the Council of the Most Serene Republic, but they were principally these three:

1st. That the Venetians had taken possession of a Turkish ship on which there were sums of money belonging to the government, and which they had taken away as booty.

2nd. That during the Turco-Russian war the Venetians had incited the Montenegrins and Macedonia against Turkish rule.

3rd. That conflicts were continually taking place between Venetian and Turkish vessels.

War was officially declared on the 3rd of December, 1714. In the first days of 1715 the Sultan Ahmed III consigned the sacred banner to his Grand Vizier, Damad Ali Pashà, now ready to leave with the army, and accompanied him to Adrianople, where

he separated from his Vizier, who at the same time was acting as generalissimo of the forces, and returned towards Seres. The army marched towards Salonica where the fleet, commanded by Admiral Janim Khogia, arrived after passing through the Dardanelles and taking on the way the citadel of Tine, whose Christian inhabitants were sent to Africa.

2. The powerful army 120,000 strong, marched in three divisions to the Peloponnese, under the supreme command of Damad Ali Pashá, who came to lay siege to the city of Corinth. The Venetians held out heroically for three months; 20,000 Janizaries and more regular infantry had surrounded the city and a general assault was determined upon, when the Venetian commander foreseeing the terrible massacre of the Christians, agreed to open the city-gates on condition that the inhabitants were left free to depart, and the soldiers march out with all the honours of war. The Turkish general accepted these conditions. Whilst his armada was sailing into Corinth, a powder-magazine burst and killed many of the soldiers. The Turks accused the Venetians of blowing up the magazine expressly, whilst the latter accused the Janizaries of doing it. These then rushed on the city with impetuous fury and set about sacking it, slaughtering citizens and soldiers alike. The governor himself was taken prisoner and sold as a slave, but he was ransomed later at Smyrna.

On receiving tidings of the fall of Corinth, the citadels of Egina and Agro opened their gates. After these successes the Ottoman army divided into two. The first division under the leadership of Turk Ahmed Pashá went to besiege the fortress situated on Mount Palamidi, which protects with its shoulders the city of Nauplia, called also the Naples of Roumania. The second division, under the command of Sari Ahmed, made for the city of Nauplia itself, which had in its fort but 1,700 defenders. These resisted manfully, but numbers won the day. Their defeat was helped on, so it is said, by the treachery of some Greeks, through their hatred of the Latin

Church, to which the besieged chiefly belonged, and of the Latin clergy who everywhere took precedence of them.



The City of Nauplia

The enemy on his entrance respected no one, sacked everything, furiously slew all he could, including the Greek bishop and many priests, and laid hold of an enormous amount of ammunition of every description.

The fall of Nauplia, which was believed to be a powerful city, spread terror everywhere. It immediately became known that the victorious forces were coming down on Modon by land and sea. The Turkish fleet was coming near, when the Venetian ships, inferior in number, hurried out of the port to avoid a conflict. Since the citadel was thus left defenceless, the governor issued a decree by which he exhorted the citizens to flee before the bloodthirsty enemy. He thus ordered that only two of the Armenian fathers should remain. So F. Emmanuel and F. Thomas set sail for Venice with books and belongings in very small quantity, for the ship was small and the fugitives were numerous.

3. When the generalissimo Damad Ali Pashà came before Modon, he bade the governor hand over the city without resistance and avoid trouble for the inhabitants, but the Venetian general, Pasta, refused. Then the Turks on the 2nd of August laid siege to Modon and bombarded the citadel for three days. The besieged answered vigorously and killed so many that the trenches were full of Turkish dead. But after the third day the governor, perceiving that further resistance was useless, hoisted the white flag, and sent delegates to the Turkish commander to treat of the terms of surrender. The parties, however, could not come to any agreement, so the Turkish generalissimo ordered a general assault and a brisk bombardment of the city. The bursting of the grenades and the number and nature of the projectiles had the appearance of a terrible hail-storm. The city was almost wholly destroyed and under the ruins a great number of the inhabitants and Venetian soldiers lay buried.

The governor had advised everyone to flee or hide but his advice was not taken, and so the Turks on entering the city could give themselves up to orgies and the intoxication of blood, without mercy for the aged, the babes or the women. We are sorry that we have not a pen burning enough to brand with infamy these terrible scenes and this unheard-of slaughter. The Turkish generalissimo had promi-

sed 30 piastres for every Christian brought alive to his tent. The soldiers brought a good many of them and he had them slaughtered before his eyes. Pasta, the governor, with other officers, took refuge on the admiral-ship of Janin Khogia Pashà who, being of a good and humane nature, saved them all and treated them with great courtesy. The Sultan Ahmed, who was at Seres, sent presents and promotions to Ali Pashà, ordered all the churches to be changed into mosques, and after other decrees against the Christians he returned to Adrianople.

4. On that tremendous day of sacking and massacring at the taking of Modon, the disciples of Mechitar, F. Lazarus and F. James, and the two lay-brothers, Brother Baptist and Brother Mark, after burying the silver plate of the church, ascended to the roof of the monastery and hid under the beams. The Turkish soldiers broke up whatever was in the church, the refectory and the rooms, turned everything upside down, and not finding the booty they hoped for, climbed up to the other storeys and even to the roof where the four monks lay concealed. It is easy to imagine their feelings when they saw they were discovered. They did not doubt but that they were going to certain death, so they recommended their souls to God. Two soldiers bound them to bring them to the generalissimo and so obtain the promised reward. However along the way others came to snatch them from the discoverers. A fight ensued and the new-comers succeeded in carrying away the two lay-brothers and bringing them in their turn to the general for the same purpose. When the soldiers learned that these monks were Armenians, they thought of getting more money by selling them to those Armenian merchants who had come with the army with the hope of buying Christian slaves. So the two priests were sold for 350 piastres to these merchants, who clothed them in Turkish apparel to ward off suspicion, and treated them as servants; and these fathers, transformed for the occasion into servants, with spontaneous abnegation and charity attended to all the wounded.

Turks on board, washed their sores, supplied them with food and humbled themselves to perform the most menial offices. When they arrived at Constantinople with the victorious army they informed F. Paul and F. John secretly of their slavery and these bought them back for 450 piastres and sent them to Venice. F. George, in the same way, ransomed the two lay-brothers who for some months had been serving on Turkish corvettes, and sent them to the Abbot in Venice.

5. It is impossible to describe the terrible anguish of Mechitar's heart for the fate of his sons left at Modon during the whole period of the war, anguish which changed into a real martyrdom when he learned of the slaughter of the Christians on the fall of the citadel — a slaughter in which he wept for his sons as killed. He therefore prayed continually.

On this nameless suffering there followed an unspeakable joy when, through the special protection of the Most Holy Mother to whom he had entrusted his children, all found themselves at Venice in his arms, in that temporary habitation beside St. Martin's church. All went to the church together and their thanks ascended to God warily and uninterruptedly. He no longer felt the loss of his convent, his goods and his provisions, and though attached to that church which he had built and adorned with such care, he trusted that our generous Lord would procure another, so he placed everything in His hands.

6. Meanwhile he had to begin all over again and think of the spiritual and material life of his community. His first care and duty was to acquaint Propaganda with these new occurrences, of his coming to Venice, where they had taken shelter in a rented house, and where they were without means, everything lost being in the Morea.

The Cardinal Prefect, Sacripante, wrote a kind letter to the Abbot consoling him and his companions, and promising to do all in his power to prevent the young community from suffering more, and

to enable it to push on to its goal. These encouragements of his did not remain mere, empty words, for he wrote to the Most Excellent Patriarch of Ve-



The house near St. Martin's, where Mechitar lived.

nice, Peter Barbarigo and to other pious patricians, to come to the help of these poor Armenian monks, fugitives from Modon, who had undergone every sacrifice and had borne up with so many vexations

and sufferings to spread knowledge and the Catholic faith throughout their unfortunate nation. The letter to the Patriarch is to be found in the archives of Propaganda under the date 14th January, 1716.

This recommendation had the desired effect. The patriarch and the Venetian nobles came immediately to ease the squalid poverty of the monks and surrounded them with a particular sympathy. They, in their turn, attached themselves to Venice with a gratitude and an affection which have lasted from that day to this — a period of two centuries. Then the clergy of Venice were particularly happy at having in their midst such a religious Congregation, whose members were examples of monastic virtues — piety and study. The Armenian monks were in their turn proud to belong to such a clergy whose ranks were adorned with learned and holy prelates and priests, and headed by such an illustrious patriarch. This mutual esteem and affection produced then and after many effective results for the good of the Catholic faith.

The help afforded by the Venetian clergy and patriciate was soon supplemented by that of Mechitar's countrymen, there being in Venice, as we already remarked, a by no means indifferent Armenian colony.

CHAPTER XII.

Armeno-Venetian relations in Mechitar's time and before.

1. Armenians in Venice and Italy. — St. Minas, or Miniatius or Expeditus, an Armenian. — The generalissimo Nerses. — 2. Mahometan invasions of Armenia and the Catholicos Stephen V in Venice for help. — Armenian emigrations to Italy, Holland and the Indies. — 3. The great power of the Genovese and Venetian Republics in all the Levant. — 4. The Armenian colonies in Italy. — Twenty Italian cities with Armenian churches. — 5. Relations between the Most Serene Republic and the Royal Court of Armenia. — 6. The Armenian king, Aiton II, a Franciscan. — 7. King Leo IV and the Doge Dandolo. — Mutual political and commercial concessions. — The port of Adalia. — 8. The end of the Armenian kingdom. — The last queen: Catherine Cornaro a Venetian. — 9. Armenians in Venice. — The legacy of the patrician Mark Ziani for an Armenian hospice. — 10. Renowned Armenian ecclesiastics and tradesmen. — 11. The first Armenian book printed in Venice (1513). — 12. Count Sheriman a noble Armenian benefactor in Venice. — 13. The Armenian church at Venice. — Its rectors. — The vardapiet Khatchatur, rector in Mechitar's time, the bearer of a letter to the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin. — His writings.

1. When Mechitar disembarked with his disciples on the Riva degli Schiavoni, he was not the first noble Armenian guest of Venice, of Italy even, which in its Roman capital, saw, in the days of the first emperors, at Nero's time and after him, Armenian

kings and princes, who in their grandeur and majesty made even the Roman people wonder.

But since it is my pleasant duty to make mention particularly of the pure, holy and Christian glories of my country, how could I pass over in silence the name of St. Minas (or Miniatus)¹? This Saint, as has been gathered from inscriptions and legends, collected in book-form in a publication by the erudite Benedictine historian (of the Olivetan Congregation), F. Placid Lugano, hailed from Armenia. He is held to be, according to an old iscription of the 12th century, King of Armenia (Rex Ermenie), or, according to some authors, the son of an Armenian king, (Minas Regis Ermeniae Filius) martyred, says F. Lugano², before the persecution of Maximinus (A. D. 235). Certainly by *King* we must understand *Satrap* (Baron), for they had quasi-regal rights over their feuds, kept an army of their own, and were very numerous in Armenia. The Persian kings, and later, the Roman Emperors, brought away with them, after a victory, the first-born and younger sons of the Satraps as hostages. There were several of them among the Roman legions, and there were martyrs too, for, as we saw in chap. II, Christianity was preserved in different provinces of Armenia, after the preaching of the Apostles SS. Thaddeus and Bartholomew. St. Minas must have been the son of some Satrap. The church in his honour on the eminence at Florence, and the ancient citadel of his name, testify to the great veneration of the Etruscan people for this Armenian wonder-worker³.

1. 'One should really say *Minas*, but custom has preferred the form *Miniatus*. The name, uncertain in origin, is pronounced in Armenian in the Greek or Latin form *Minas*, and Latin scholars of the Middle Ages made out of it *Mineas-atis*, *Minias*, - *atis*, or even *Miniatus - ti*'. F. Placid Lugano, '*St. Miniatus at Florence, History and Legend*'. Flor. 1902.

2. *Ibid*.

3. The Armenian Church honours two Saints under the

But leaving Tuscany and coming to Venice, we find that it too, from the first years of its foundation, had illustrious Armenians guests, either residing or passing through. Amongst the latter, after the invasions of the barbarian hordes, the first to come was the famous generalissimo of the Byzantine Empire, Narses, who went to Ravenna to capture it, and was so touched by the hospitality of the islanders, that he willingly offered to settle a dispute between the Venetians and the Paduans.

Besides, the Exarchate of Ravenna, which represented the Eastern Empire in Italy, and acted as a tutor to the newly-born Venice, had a certain number of exarchs of Armenian nationality, as is attested by the monuments in the church of St. Vitalis. What is more, the Armenians of Ravenna were the pioneers of the extensive commerce carried on between Venice and Lesser Armenia, which increased much more as time went on; particularly under the Rubinian dynasty in Armenia-Cilicia. In this way Venice with Genoa and Amsterdam became the most

name *Minas*. One, *St. Minas the Great*, has a proper hymn and is called *Expeditus the Wonder-worker*. He was martyred between the years 300-310. The other, *St. Minas the Egyptian*, was martyred in the year 303. Hence the date of *St. Minas of Florence* shows that they were different persons. *St. Minas the Great* is always represented in military dress. Old paintings and prints on old hymnaries have him as a cavalier, with a bright aureole on his head, a flag in his hand, and his eyes looking heavenwards in ecstasy. Throughout the whole of Armenia and Asia Minor there is an infinity of churches and chapels in his honour.

It has been conclusively shown by F. John Aucher, Mechitarist of Venice, that *St. Minas* or *Miniatius* is the same person as is honoured in Italy under the name *Expeditus*. The Armenian hymns and prayers to *St. Minas* give him the title of *Expeditus*, i. e. the *Ready-Helper*. cf. *Civiltà Cattolica*, 1906, vol. I, p. 459. '*On the cult of the martyr, St. Expeditus*'. It is my humble opinion that his cult was introduced into Italy and the rest of Europe along with the Armenian immigrations.



The Church of St. Minas (or Miniatus) at Florence.

populous, the most intellectual and the richest centres of the Armenian colonies.

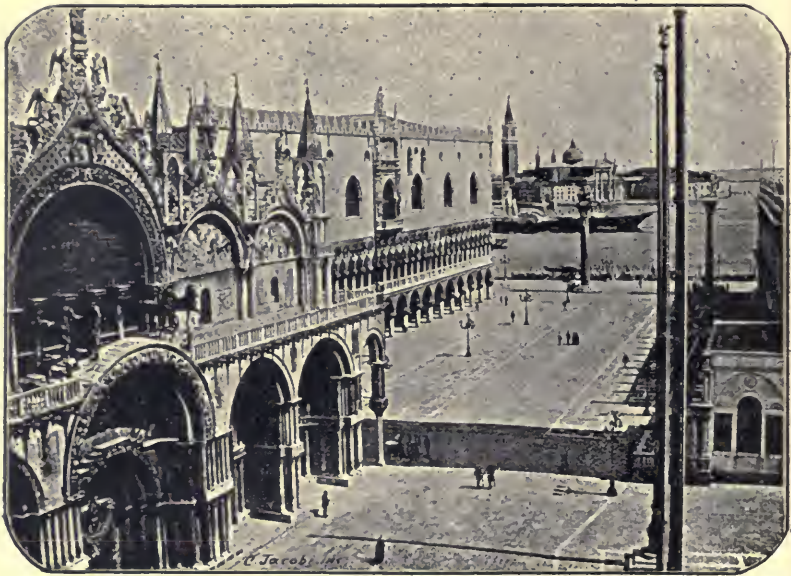
2. These emigrations, especially those which were consequent to the fall of the Armenian kingdom, were to Christian lands, noticeably to Italy, and here an Armenian colony was formed, with its Armenian church and Armenian priest. The Catholicos of Etchmiadzin from time to time sent Visitors to provide for their spiritual needs and collect alms for the churches in Armenia, sacked and destroyed by Turks, Persians and other Mahometan races.

Among those who resorted to the West for moral or material help against Mahometan invaders, we find the Catholicos Stephen V, and Thaddeus II. The first, coming to Venice in the year 1548 to ask for nothing less than the safety and freedom of his country from the Persian barbarians to be accomplished by the Most Serene, calls Venice 'the invincible shield of superb Italy', and apostrophizes her in these terms, 'Though through the authority of Peter the Apostle, the city of Rome holds the primacy, nevertheless, you, O immortal city of Venice, are the key and the heart of Christendom'.

Whoever visits Venice and the wonderful, charming church of St. Mark, asks with curiosity why Armenian travellers have carved their name and little figures on the hard marble - columns of the façade. It was due to their unbounded enthusiasm.

It is not out of place to observe here how the history of a nation's grandeur is revealed too in its colonies and its foreign relations. To understand the influence and greatness of Venice and Genoa, one must visit all the Adriatic coast, and go through the Mediterranean, the Tyrrhenian, the Ionian, the Egean, and the Black Seas. Then the traveller is astounded at the remarkable vestiges of these two Republics, now, after so many centuries, narrated and sung by these peoples as myths. Everywhere there have been constructed castles, fortresses, towers, walls, churches, and fabrics, which proclaim their grandeur with a mighty voice.

We do not know the cause of the coming to Venice of the Catholicos, Thaddeus II. (1577). Innumerable bishops, too, passed through Venice on their way to Rome, to procure the Pope's intercession with Christian rulers for new Crusades against Islam. Sometimes they also collected alms for the liberation of the slaves.



The Church of St. Mark, Venice.

The Armenian colonies in Europe, particularly those of Holland and Italy, were rich, but could not hold a candle to those of India, which were exceedingly rich, and kept up relations with the mother-country through the Persian Gulf. The merchants and the possessors of precious stones were generally Armenians, and the Armenian small-traders under Venetian Procuracy, were in continual intercourse with the stone-merchants of Persia and the

Indies. To tell the truth, the Armenians of Venice were well known and appreciated in this line of business, and kept up correspondence with other colonies in Italy and in other parts of Europe.



F. Leontius Alishan, Mechitarist of Venice.

4. To show the importance of these Armenian colonies, F. Leontius Alishan, Mechitarist of Venice, a sagacious investigator of Armenian history, searched in all the archives of Italy, and brought to light

a priceless store of information for the colonial history of Armenia in Italy¹.

The Venetian colony, rich, numerous and esteemed by the Most Serene Republic, had its beautiful national church, and monasteries besides. Ravenna was the first to receive Armenians into Italy, in the early centuries of the Christian era, and was called the *Armenian City*; similarly with Rimini².

1. F. Alishan (1820-1901) was a renowned poet and a historian of great fame. In his youth he composed, with wonderful, burning imagination, many sacred and inspired poems, which have been published in several volumes. Numberless hymns have been written by him, and really sublime are the verses which sing of the earthly paradise of our first parents. They were written on the occasion of some princely wedding. He sings in poetry, too, of the ancient glories of war in pagan and Christian Armenia, from Haikh who fought against Nembrod down to General Vardan, saint and martyr, who took up arms in defence of the Christian faith against the Persians in the 5th century.

A historian of vast erudition, he gathered whatever had been written about Armenia and Armenians, and published remarkable volumes on the relations between Armenia and the West, as well as several monographs on the Armenian provinces.

For sixty years the idol of his countrymen and the representative of their sacred ideals, Armenians resorted to him from every part of the world. He led a life of austerity, contemplation and fertile activity, far from the noise of the world, free from all ostentation, and was the author of spiritual and ascetic works, not unworthy of the Holy Fathers. He died in the odour of sanctity, on the 21st November, 1901, on his knees before his crucifix, after receiving the Sacraments with angelical devotion.

He received many honours from various academies and scientific societies nominated him their member. He translated into Armenian several masterpieces of English, German, French and Italian authors and spoke these languages like a native.

2. Some Armenian archeologist wrote that Rimini (a name derived from *Armenian*) was a very ancient Armenian colony before Aeneas came to Italy. The same was said of Etruria. All the Etruscan inscriptions, including

In Pisa there was another Armenian colony, which, especially in the 18th century, produced Armenian doctors of medicine of great fame, who went to practice their profession in the East. Naples, Siena



The Sacred Countenance

and graceful Florence had all Armenian colonies. In the last-named there was the monumental basi-

those on vases and other Etruscan objects now in the Vatican museum, are written in the ancient language of Armenia. The writer of these lines came upon this interesting and voluminous work in 1876, which he found not devoid of errors. It was never printed, the author having no means.

lica in honour of St. Minas, kept by Armenian Basilian monks from the eleventh century¹.

The Armenian Basilians had a handsome church at Genoa also, named St. Bartholomew of the Armenians, where there was consigned to their care, in 1830, the *Sacred Countenance* of our Redeemer, sent by our Lord to the King of Edessa, then a part of Armenian Mesopotamia, (according to a tradition attested by Eusebius in the 4th century and Moses Corenensis in the 5th century) to cure him from some malady which had hitherto defied all remedies². Barnabites succeeded to the Armenian religious, but the Armenian tradition still remains.

We think we shall be rendering a service to students, if we mention the Armenian churches to be found in Italian cities. We take all the data from F. Alishan's work, entitled *Sissuan*:

Rome, 1240, St. Anne, St. Gregory, Beheading of St. Paul³.

Florence, 1255-1491, St. Basil.

Rimini, 1254, St. John, St. Matthew.

Ancona, 1261, Holy Ghost, St. Anastasia.

Siena, 1270, St. Mary, (Holy Cross, Holy Sepulchre.).

Perugia, 1271, St. Matthew, St. Barnabas.

Salerno, 1283, St. John, St. Cosmas.

Orvieto, 1288, N. N.

Viterbo, 1290, S. S. Simon and Jude.

Bologna, 1303, St. Mary, St. John Baptist, Holy Ghost.

Osimo, 1496, St. Basil, Our Lady of Carmel.

Ferrara, 1304-1442, St. Anne.

Genoa, 1307, St. Bartholomew, Apostle of Armenia.

Padua, 1308, St. Mary of Nazareth.

Fasioli, 1312, (Manfredonia), N. N.

1. See. F. Lugano, '*St. Miniatus in Florence*' (in Italian). He says that in Tuscany there were more than forty churches in honour of St. Miniatus.

2. See Appendix III.

3. It is an ancient tradition that the church of the Three Fountains (Tre Fontane) was first kept by Armenian monks.

Gubbio, 1318, Holy Angels, St. Anne.
 Lucca, 1319, St. Paul.
 Fabriano, 1319 Holy Ghost.
 Parma, 1319, St. Basil.
 Pisa, 1320, S. S. Cosmas and Damian.
 Naples, 1328, Holy Ghost.
 Pistoja, 1340, St. Basil, St. Onophrins.
 Venice, 1348, St. John Baptist, Holy Cross (1334).
 Faenza, 1372, St. Thomas, (St. Martha).

Besides the churches above-mentioned with their dates, there were more at Forlì, Imola, Pesaro, Peschiera and Civitavecchia, says F. Alishan. They are all mentioned in the manuscript memorials which were the property of these churches. Churches built later are omitted.

F. Alishan has also deduced with certainty from some epigraphs on tomb-stones, that all these colonies had a common bishop, and this is confirmed by the existence of an Armenian bishop, Thomas, who died at Perugia in 1380 and is mentioned as *Bishop of Italy*.

The church at Leghorn is of more recent date, and we shall speak of it separately, when we treat of Mechitar's journey to the city. We shall do the same with the church of Holy Cross at Venice, it being our intention to treat separately whatever refers to Mechitar and his times.

5. But very dear to the Mechitarist's heart is the thought of the inseparable union between his community and the city of Venice, which recalls the relations of long ago between the last Armenian monarchy, called *Rubinian*, which reigned in Cilicia, and the *Dominating* Venetian Republic, between the Armenian king Leo IV and Henry Dandolo, and between the court of Sissuan and the Ducal Council. Both Armenians and Venetians were a practical people and each knew the value of the other. The pivot of their relations was the commerce between the Armenian mercantile marine and the Most Serene, which in 1282, seeing how greatly their commerce was developing, established *bailiffs* at the Ar-

menian Court, who remained there until 1334, when Ajas, the most important port on the part of the Mahometans, was captured. Among these bailiffs we find the names of the highest Venetian patricians: Morosini, Sando, Dolfin, Grimani, Giustiniani, Badoero, De Canali, Seniolo, Gisi, Quirino, Premarino Barbarigo, Dandolo, Bragadin, Malipiero, Caroso and others¹.

On the other hand the Armenian kings were particularly deferent to the Venetian Republic and its representatives, and the *Charter of Concessions* of Aiton I (1291), of Leo II (1271) and of Aiton II, testify not merely to the commerce exercised on such a large scale, but also to their friendly political relations.

6. The last-mentioned monarch was alternately a king and a religious. He would go out from the Franciscan monastery to the battlefield, to defend his country and his religion against Mahometan invaders, and then, after the victory, leave aside his sword to take up his breviary. A prince of great courage and bravery, victorious over the Tartars and Egyptians, and at the same time a humble son of St. Francis of Assisi under the name of Brother John, he is known to posterity as Blessed John, and his picture is found in many friaries of the Order, as, for instance, in the former Franciscan monastery at Venice, in the parish of St. Job, and at St. Isodore's, Rome. Aiton II was a warm friend of Venice. He went to Constantinople to visit the Empress

1. The greatest traveller in the Middle Ages, the Venetian, Marco Polo (1271), who visited the lands of the Tartars, the Indians and the Chinese, says of the port of *Ajas* or *Giazza*: 'On the sea is the city of *Giazza*, a place of great traffic. To its harbour come a great number of merchants from Venice, Genoa and many other places, with merchandise of various kinds, cloth of silk, wool and other precious material; and those who wish to go further into eastern lands, go first to the port of *Giazza*'. On the papers of Genovese merchants (1274) *Ajas* is called *Portes Ayacii Domini Regis Ermenie*.

Rita, his sister, and wife of the emperor, Michael, and bestirred himself to induce him to intervene between Venetians and Genovese and make them return to peace¹.

When Aiton II ceded the throne to his brother Oshin and retired to a monastery, the sovereigns of



Aiton II, Armenian king and Franciscan friar.

the West sent ambassadors to the coronation, and the Doge, Peter Gradenigo, sent, too, as extraordi-

1. From the fact that Aiton's picture is to be found in a cell of the Franciscan friary at St. Job's, someone wished to conclude that he had lived in that cell. But it cannot be proved historically, nor could he have possibly been there.

nary ambassador, the patrician, John Foscarini, with very rich presents, and to inform the Armenian prince, that he could borrow money from the Most Serene Republic. It was a time when the Venetians procured gold and ships for everybody. King Oshin always maintained the most friendly relations with Venice, and, on the occasion of the papal interdict on that city in the year 1310, he asked the Pope to remove it.

7. The relations between Venice and Armenian Cilicia were at their best under Leo IV, through the medium of the famous Marino Sanudo Torcello. The Most Serene bound itself in writing to preserve the kingdom of Armenia, and, in return, her citizens had greater commercial concessions, received warehouses and churches in Mamestia and were given certain privileges, among which was this that a Venetian could only be judged directly by the Royal court (1333). The port of great traffic for Lower Armenia was Adalia, which, according to F. Alishan, was a part of Leo's territory. It had a well-sheltered harbour and was surrounded by rich and smiling villages.

But these agreements between King Leo IV and the Doge Dandolo, did not last long. Cilicia, threatened for some time by the Caraman, by the Sultan of Egypt and the one of Aleppo, was invaded. King Leo had recourse to the Republic of Venice, and he sent to Pope John XXII to raise a crusade of French and English (1327), while these were at enmity one with another. Thus he lost the Mediterranean shore, after bloody conflicts, and at the same time all relations with western powers were cut off. Venice and her ally, Persia, beat back the Caraman, and managed to seize several littoral fortresses of Cilicia, but had to leave them shortly in the hands of the Sultans of Egypt and Aleppo, and of the Caraman.

8. These powerful and numerous assailants succeeded, after a long and desperate struggle, in destroying the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia and in taking prisoner the last king, Leo V. Through the intervention of the king of Castille he was set free;



Port of Adalia in Armenian Cilicia.

then he went to Rhodes to see his relatives; thence he set sail for Venice, and passed down to Rome to seek the Pope's intercession with the kings of France and England to help him in a Crusade. Pope Urban IV welcomed him kindly and patronized his cause. But Europe was in a turmoil. Leo died on his pilgrimage, in the year 1393, and was buried in the church of St. Denys, Paris, where his monument is to be seen, with his effigy in alto-rilievo.

The title of '*King of Armenia*' passed to his near relations, the Princes Lusignani of Cyprus, and the last to bear it was the Venetian Catherine Cornaro, who was brought by the Most Serene to Venice where she died. On her tomb is to be read the title '*Queen of Cyprus and Jerusalem*' and also that of '*Queen of Armenia*'. Thus, where we see the last flicker of Armenian civil power, we also see the birth and the prosperous growth of a spiritual, moral and intellectual power, under the auspices of Abbot Mechitar.

9. When Mechitar came to Venice, this dominating and brilliant city was already brimming with friendly souvenirs for Armenians, who found there kindness and sympathy, even when Armenia was no longer a power. If Venice, when it lost its territory on the sea-board, could no longer enter Armenian lands, the Armenians came in greater numbers to Venice and the whole of Italy. But the '*Queen of the Adriatic*' was always preferred on account of its proximity and the facility with which Armenians could find a home and a refuge there in case of trouble.

Already in the earlier years of the 13th century, a rich Armenian merchant had left funds for a chapel and a hospice for the needy. This benefaction was furthered by the munificence of the noble patrician, Mark Ziani in 1253. Ziani, nephew of the Doge Sebastian, during his stay in Armenia, had learnt to appreciate the friendship of this nation with the Republic, and as a grateful and perennial souvenir, he left the Armenian colony in his legacy a house of his in the parish of St. Julian, in that

quarter which for centuries has been called the Armenian quarter, where, in the first years of the 16th century, there rose the Armenian church of Holy Cross. The Italian historian Sandi mentions Ziani's gift in the following terms: 'There ranks in Venetian commerce, and in past centuries there has ranked the Armenian nation, which deserves a welcome, a habitation and protection in Venice. Their correspondence with Venice, and their consequent residence in the capital, goes back to very ancient times. Since the year 1253, by a will confirmed in the following year, M. Ziani, nephew of the Doge Sebastian, of a family which is said by Venetian chroniclers to have been splendid in its wealth, who had become quite attached to Armenians through his long residence among them on business,... .. bequeathed a house to them in the Venetian procuracy of Citra'.

This place, where a little chapel was erected in the beginning, became a sympathetic centre, a little Armenian homeland for those who were travelling by sea and called in at the great, dominating metropolis. There they found a contingent of Armenians, a national church, and a priest of their own to recall to them their distant home. Hence it was that those women and families come from Persia or Julfa did not feel the loneliness of immigration to 'strange fields and pastures new'. These Armenian families were upwards of a hundred in number, and their sons gradually became almost Venetians, acquired the feelings of citizenship in one's own country, and were distinguished, not only in commerces, or as agents between East and West, but in every branch of industry.

10. This Armenian colony gave bishops to Venice, and canons, parish-priests, monks and religious. The Franciscan and Dominican Annals are a proof of it. Mgr. Stephen Dominic Sheriman (1729-1806), belonging to the princely Armenian family of Sheriman, was a Dominican, and was nominated, with the permission of the Most Serene, Bishop of Caorle, and then was transferred to Chioggia. The

noble house of Manughian had its worthy representative in Don Peter, an Olivetan (1727-1875), in the island of St. Helena. In the same way we find many an Armenian in the ranks, not merely of the city clergy, but also in those of the neighbouring districts. They all loved their heavenly country, but they loved, too, their new country on earth, Venice, and this love they have handed down to succeeding generations.

I should be very tedious, were I to mention all the industries in which these sons of Armenia excelled, but it would be a great forgetfulness on my part, if I did not point out their merits in the question of the Arsenal, and if I did not say a word about Anthony Surian called '*the Armenian*' par excellence. This Armenian left an imperishable name in the Annals of the Arsenal and the Republic, in the first half of the 16th century. He presented to the Council and the Doge a project for the extraction of sunken ships, for the excavation of canals, for dredges, and he obtained the necessary briefs. At the time of a terrible plague, he discovered a medicine, which, with the approval of the sanitary authorities, he distributed among the plague-stricken, and which effected many cures. But his greatest merit was on the grand day of the battle of Lepanto. On 'that most happy day he adjusted the artillery to the huge galleys — a feat never repeated — which did such good service, as was manifest to all, in that miraculous encounter. On that same day, he ingeniously stopped a leak in one of the galleys, which certainly was sinking'. The Republic, to give some immortal token of its gratitude, noted this in her Annals, for it certainly gave no slight help to the final victory, and we thought it well not to overlook it'. Anthony Surian '*the Armenian*' left as heirs of his inventions and industries, his son and grandsons, who for a long time enjoyed a good reputation.

1. Alishan. '*Armenians (and) Venetians*'. p. 254.

But the Armenians in Venice gained great honour in intellectual pursuits too, for, among other things, here was printed the first Armenian book — a Astrology — in 1513. Many other works followed close on this one, and we find books being continually printed in Venice until Abbot Mechitar's arrival, and the installing of that famous Armenian Printing — Office, which spread all around a vivid light, and raised to the highest the name of Venice among Armenians of far-distant lands. Amongst those who interested themselves much in bringing out the first Armenian editions before Mechitar's time, we find a priest Don John Dersenzi, who published various works in the Alberti printing-press, and hailed from the East. This priest also visited Rome and spoke highly of the works of Pope Gregory XIII, and his institution of the new Calendar, which he translated and explained (1504). But the masterpiece of Armenian printing until then, came from Amsterdam, in the publishing of the *Universal Atlas* in 1695, a work appreciated even to-day. In its day it was of immense geographical and scientific value. I omit further mention of numerous other books on history, geography and poetry written in Venice and about Venice, many of which were published, in course of time, by the Mechitarists in their Review, which began in 1843, and continues to be of some utility.

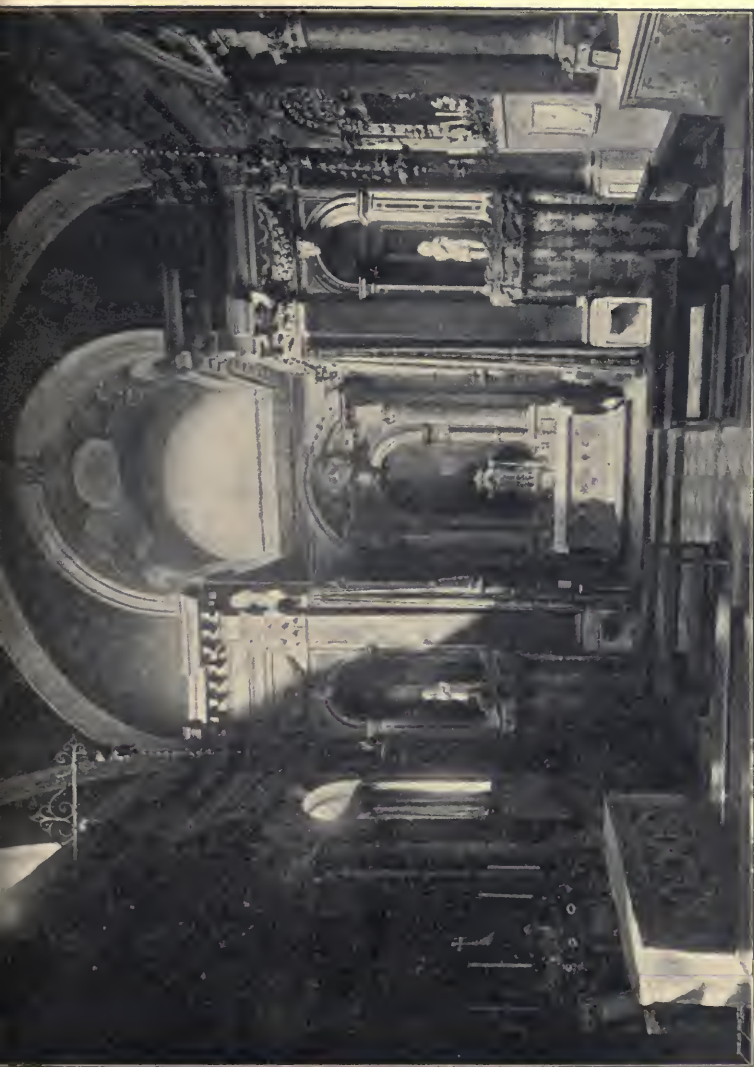
12. Venice thus became an intellectual centre for Armenians, and those who resorted there, found help not only from their compatriots, but also from patricians and Doges, who had come to esteem highly this Oriental people, the traditional friends of the Most Serene. But it is my duty to observe that the Armenian colony in Venice was not ungrateful to the Republic. It was attached to the latter inseparably, and a rich and noble Armenian, Count Baptist Sheriman († 1854), left in his will the sum of over a million francs, and houses and shops over and above, to be given to found an orphanage in the name of the last Doge, Manin. He chose this name to indicate, along with his own generosity, the Ar-

menians' gratefulness, heartfelt love and enthusiasm for the city of Venice. This institution continues to flourish to this day through the benevolent assistance of city and citizens.

The government often used its Armenian subjects to translate public documents from Turkish and Arabic. Amongst these interpreters or translators, a certain George had a great name. In his old age the Senate gave him a handsome pension (1519), that he might live in comfort 'on account of his faithful and extraordinary services'. His son also was distinguished in the same profession, and in his free moments translated from Arabic the medical works of the famous Arab doctor Ebu Sinai (called by Europeans Avicenna), to the orders of the celebrated Nicolas Massa, who then translated them into Latin and offered them to St. Charles Borromeo.

13. The Armenian population of Venice, from whose numbers such personages came, had become so important and so numerous, that, about the year 1579, to provide for its wants, a kind of Constitution was arranged to facilitate its management in charitable help and in ecclesiastical affairs. By virtue of this Constitution a hospice for the poor was erected, an agent was nominated to gather collections for charitable purposes and the upkeep of their church. Since the little Chapel was no longer sufficient, permission was obtained from the ecclesiastical and civil authorities to construct a church large enough for the growing community, together with a Rector of their own nationality.

F. Alishan mentions how the Armenians of Venice had recourse to Pope Leo X for a Brief to build their church. It was constructed between the years 1513-15, with contributions from rich Armenian merchants, and was dedicated to the apparition of the Holy Cross. This fine church with its beautiful cupola had and still has three altars: the high altar dedicated to the Holy Cross, a side altar to Our Lady, and another to St. Gregory the Illuminator. In the vestibule and in the interior are to be seen tombs of Armenians. This little church, which



Holy Cross, the Armenians' Church in the city of Venice.

is a jewel in art, is the object of every Armenian's love, be he residing or merely visiting, and he has often embellished it with marbles and precious stones. Sometimes the Rector was appointed by the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, who also sent a Visitor for various purposes.

However, as time went on and schism began to creep into the Armenian nation and not all the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin were in communion with the Church of Rome, the Armenian community at Venice, desirous of remaining absolutely Catholic, no longer sent to Etchmiadzin for their parish-priest but asked for him directly from the Pope.

When Abbot Mechitar arrived in Venice, the Rector, or rather the Preacher, as the Armenians say, was the vardapiet Khatchatur, already known to the reader of these pages, who received his investiture *from the Holy See* in 1708, as he writes to Abbot Mechitar. This continued for many years, in fact, as long as the Most Serene existed.

14. Khatchatur, the most resplendent figure amongst the secular clergy of his day, in theological matters, was born in Erzerum, in the year 1666. After his elementary studies in his native city, he passed to the monastery of Etchmiadzin, which, as we remarked elsewhere, was reputed to be the highest educational-centre then in the whole of Armenia. There he came across the vardapiet Vardan Hovnanian, a former student of Propaganda College, Rome, to whom he became particularly attached and whom he greatly respected and esteemed. So when Vardan retired to Rome in 1682, Khatchatur, who was burning with the desire of learning, went with him and succeeded in being admitted into the Propaganda College. After a brilliant course of studies, he returned to Armenia and was missionary there and in various parts of Asia Minor, leaving behind him everywhere the reputation of being an eloquent and profound preacher, a learned theologian and an esteemed casuist. Attracted by his fame, Mechitar went to see him in Constantinople in the year 1696, to persuade him to be the head of a Congre-

gation of preachers of faith and penance in his country. We saw how the Servant of God did not succeed in his design. A year later, Khatchatur was sent by Pope Innocent XII as the bearer of an autograph letter of the Pontiff and gifts to Nahapiet, the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, with full power to preach to and encourage Catholics everywhere.

This confidential mission considerably increased his reputation, and on his return to Constantinople he was looked on as the most influential vardapiet among the Catholic priests who began to separate from the Armenian patriarchate, then showing itself to be in opposition to the Church of Rome. How great and how sought after was his influence in ecclesiastical affairs, can be gathered from the estimation he was held in by the ambassador of France, Monsieur Fériel, who often took counsel from him. Hence the Patriarch Avetic had his eye on him, and had destined him for the Turkish galleys, when, learning of the decision of the irate patriarch, Khatchatur secretly fled in a ship bound for Venice, where he arrived in 1707. In the following year he was nominated by the Holy See parish-priest of the Armenian church.

In 1719, he was sent by the Holy See as Apostolic Visitor to the Armenians of Transylvania. On this occasion, the zealous prelate left his flock to the care of Abbot Mechitar, who sent F. John to the city to take charge. The same was done in 1725, when Khatchatur went to Rome for the Holy Jubilee. There, with Mechitar's advice, he refuted with his authoritative word some accusations brought against the Abbot's missionaries.

Until the last day of his life, he was the greatest friend of the Servant of God and his Congregation, and when he departed this life (30th April, 1740), with his heart wholly given up to God, and giving great edification to the bystanders, he left to the Mechitarists all his writings and the little he possessed, and recommended his soul to the prayers of all. He was buried in the Church of the Holy Cross, where he was parish-priest. This office pass-

ed later to the Congregation through the want of Catholic Armenian secular priests in Venice.

Khatchatur wrote several works in Armenian:

1. Armenian Grammar, Leghorn, 1696.
2. Book of Sermons for the whole year, Venice, 1710.
3. Philosophical Rhetoric, Venice, 1713. (In verse).
4. Commentary on the Book of Canticles, Venice, 1700.
5. General Dogmatic Theology, Venice, 1709.
6. Moral Theology, Venice, 1709.

In Latin:

1. Introduction to Christian Perfection, 1725.
2. A treatise on the whole of Speculative, Dogmatic, Positive and Moral Theology, Venice, 1725.

This last-mentioned work deserves particular praise. We have also to hand several of his letters and theological refutations in Armenian and Latin, in which language he appears well versed. His works were very much sought after and were of great authority before Abbot Mechitar began to write, but the Abbot's works and those of his first disciples completely eclipsed those of Khatchatur. Yet this no reason why we should not acknowledge his profound intellect.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mechitar receives from the Venetian Republic the Island of St. Lazarus.

1. Mechitar recognises the impossibility of returning to Modon. — Decides to remain in Venice. — 2. The benevolence of the Venetian Republic in conceding an island. — 3. The Island of St. Lazarus; its history. — 4. The Senate presents it to Mechitar. — Mechitar goes to live at St. Lazarus (8th Sept. 1717). — 6. He is invited to Rome. — Preparations for departure.

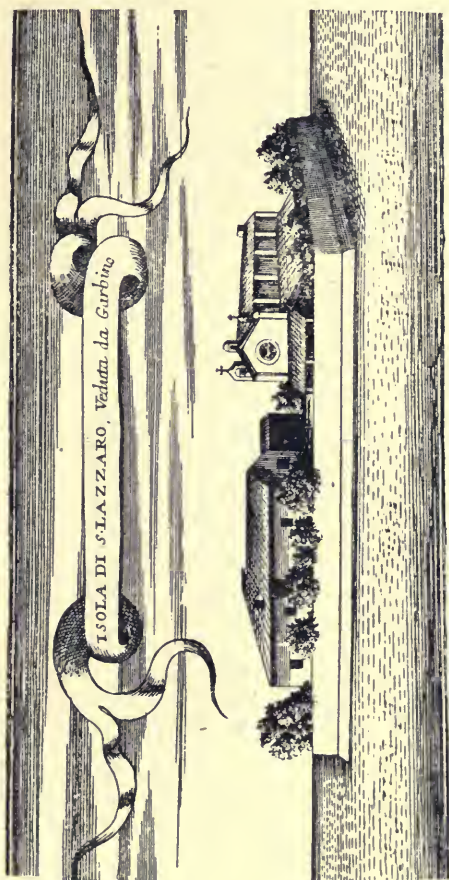
1. Abbot Mechitar on leaving the monastery of Modon, though trembling for the fate of the arms of the Republic of Venice, which were much inferior in number to those of the Turks, nevertheless hoped that at the eleventh hour the affair would eventually result in the compensation of damages and that the country would remain in Venetian hands. His heart lulled itself to peace in this last hope, for it was attached to that monastery and that church, and his thoughts were joyful when he conjured up the vision of a near return to the beloved spot, and the taking-up again of the regular life. But even this hope dwindled away with the multiplication of disasters in the war, and it had to confront the hard, regrettable truth, which warned him to resign himself for ever, entirely forget the labours of twelve years, give up whatever he built or possessed and look out for new resources and a new home. He took counsel of the elder monks. The situation was

examined and all came to the conclusion that it was now well nigh impossible to think of returning to Modon and that the hand of God had guided them to Venice, which was not only a safe city, but one where they could find the best means of progressing in their study of humanities and theology. It was thus decided to remain in Venice and take steps to find a place suitable for their monastic life.

2. The Abbot, relying on the splendid introductions left him in writing by the General of the Venetian government in the Morea, began to frequent the Senate-hall and place his case before several of the Senators. He found very deferential and helpful his friends of the Peloponnesus, such as Anthony Nani, Angel Emo, Sebastian Mocenigo, Soranzo and others. He had already won the sympathy of all the citizens, and he saw that the Venetians would not let him leave the city.

However the matter was not without its difficulties. The first of them was that the Senate had decreed that no other religious Congregation could come to the city of Venice. Notwithstanding this, wishing to interpret the decree with the greatest benevolence, in view of the numerous recommendations of the nobility, it proposed to the Abbot to choose some place outside the city. Mechitar did not wish to go far from it. As everyone knows, it is comfortably situated in the centre of a lagoon and surrounded by a host of small islands scattered here and there towards the Adriatic and towards the mainland. He preferred those islands which lay towards the sea and did not take into consideration those near Tusina or Murano or Burano. He studied every island with a careful thought for the future and finally chose the island of St. Lazarus. It was sufficiently high above the sea-level, not too distant from the city, well situated, where the abundance of fresh air restores and revives one, and not much exposed to the fury of wind or wave. Rather it was protected by the very long island Isola del Lido, by San Nicoletto (Little St. Nicolas) and Malamocco. The island was then possessed of a church and had

a few habitations, all in a bad state but not irreparable. As if rending the veil of the future, he saw rise on that island his beloved monastery, built with true architectonic genius, and in truth in a few years



The island of St. Lazarus, when Mechtar was there.

it was a gem of constructive art, a smiling laura, a sanctuary long sighed-for, a nursery of science and learning, the object of pilgrimages, the peaceful goal of innumerable personages, honoured with a visit from Pope Pius VII, from sovereigns, card-

nals, princes, men of science, and people from all countries, east and west, in fine, a real holy ark of the Armenian nation.



Sarcophagus by Constantine Zuchola,

3. This little island, at that time abandoned, was not without a historic past. In the year 810 we find it an indescribable locality without any houses. It was

then given by the Senate to the Benedictines of St. Hilary who were at San Fusino, on the western shore of the lagoon, but they found the island to be too far from the city, so they abandoned it. In 1182 the Venetian patrician, Leo Paulini, received it as a gift from the Benedictine Abbot Hubert, and built there a little church surrounded with little cells for the lepers for whom there was not a convenient place in the city. The commercial relations of the Republic and the great number of persons who travelled from the East to the Most Serene Republic had introduced and intensified that terrible disease.

Generally churches attached to leper-houses are dedicated to St. Lazarus, in memory of the Lazarus of the Gospel who was poor and covered with sores, and the houses are called Lazarets. So the church on this little Venetian isle was called after St. Lazarus, the friend of Jesus Christ, was under the jurisdiction of the patriarchal church of St. Peter in Castello, and had its own rector and chaplain. Memory has not forgotten the name of a certain worthy Rector whose beautiful sarcophagus is still to be seen in the right wing of the church bearing the following inscription (in Latin).

*In this tomb is buried the good and wise
Constantine of the Zuchola family, rector
of St. Lazarus, a compassionate lover of
the poor, now crowned with the honours
of the Lord on high.*

Though the date is not given, yet we know from the Annals of the Republic that Constantine Zuchola armed at his own expense a galley in the war against the Genoese, in the year 1354¹.

The rigorous sanitary decrees of the Most Serene helped greatly to obliterate this terrible and

1. cf. Coronelli, 'Isolario dell'Atlante Veneto'. — Capeletti, 'Storia dell'isola di San Lazzaro, p. p. 10-11.

disgusting plague and so by the 16th century the island was free from lepers. Then the Senate or-



. John Corner, IIIth Doge of Venice.

daigned that the sick poor be transferred thither. But its remoteness from the city, especially felt on wind-

y days and when the sea was boisterous, endangered the transport of the invalids, and so this command was not put into effect for a long time. Meanwhile the sick were brought to the hospital of SS. John and Paul, to which was added a priory for the Dominicans. In the year 1660 when the Dominicans were expelled from Crete and took refuge in Venice, the Most Serene gave them the island of St. Lazarus, but they did not remain there long because it was too far from the city. From that time onwards the island remained unoccupied. There lived there but one man, a gardener, who let out the ground for tilling, and was himself engaged in planting vegetables.

This was the state of the island when Mechitar came to visit it in 1716. He was attracted by the smiling solitude, the peaceful surroundings, the stupendous horizon, the picturesque panorama and the mysterious moaning of the Adriatic Sea. He immediately took steps in the Senate to have that islet for his own, and friends in the Venetian patriciate and many of the citizens, admirers and correct valuers of the Abbot and his monks, supported his plea.

4. The Senate, though desirous of having Mechitar and his Congregation of Orientals in its dominions and even near the capital, still wished to proceed, as usual, with caution and told off some ecclesiastical jurists to study the question thoroughly and examine the Constitution and the Rules of the new Community, to see if in any way they were contrary to the laws of the Republic. When the two jurisconsults after careful examination gave their negative answer, the Senate by a decree of the 26th August, 1717, presented the island of St. Lazarus to Mechitar and his community in perpetuity.

The Doge of Venice at that time was John Corner, the 111th of his line, and he had always shown great sympathy towards the Community from the day of its flight to Venice from Modon.

The decree ran as follows:

The Armenian Fathers of St. Anthony the Abbot, who first fled from Asia Minor and the persecution of heretics, and were publicly welcomed at Modon, and later were compelled to leave that district by reason of barbaric inroads, have sought a refuge here in this capital and live in the praiseworthy hope of being granted some secluded spot away from the city where they can devote themselves to their spiritual exercises. For this end they publicly ask to be allowed rent the island of St. Lazarus.

After information received we approve of their plea, since the island is small and particularly adapted to the sacred exercise of mendicant religious. Thus comforted may they apply themselves in their present number to the pious works of their institute and pray fervently for the welfare of our Republic.

However we hereby declare that this renting can not be renewed without previous public consent; and also, that any Pontifical brief which deals with your society must first be submitted to our assembly for approbation.

(L. S.)

James Buserello, secretary.

MDCCVII. August XXVIth. ¹

5. Mechitar, on receiving the decree, returned due thanks, and on the 8th of September, the Feast of the Nativity of the B. V. M. a redletter day in the history of the Congregation (for precisely on that day was it founded at Constantinople), he stepped on to the island with all his religious. He went directly to the little church to thank the Lord and His Virgin-Mother and then took possession of such few cells as could serve as a habitation.

On that day they all renewed the vow they had made at Constantinople sixteen years previously in such miserable straits and which they had unfailingly kept, namely, to celebrate solemnly with an octave the birthday of the Virgin Mary, with the humble devotion of adopted sons towards such a Mother.

1. Later on, in the year 1833, the Mechitarian Congregation bought up the island and became proprietor.

The Divine Mother gave proof on that same date of her all-powerful intercession. In the year 1810 when all the religious Congregations in Italy were suppressed by Napoleon I, the small Armenian community whose suppression would have meant destruction, having no branch-houses elsewhere, was spared by the French conqueror by the supernatural influence and protection of Mary, to whom the poor, unarmed monks had turned in prayer. In fact on the anniversary of her birthday there came an Imperial Decree to St. Lazarus, which not only saved the Mechitarian Congregation, but to safeguard it for the future, raised it to the dignity of an Academy. By a happy thought, as bearer of this imperial rescript, there was chosen a high official of Armenian nationality who was incorporated in the conqueror's army.

Mechitar, on landing on the island that festival-day, was reminded of the monastery and island of Sevan, where the Most Holy Virgin had promised him the fulfilment of the desires of his heart; and the island of St. Lazarus was an eloquent realization of our Blessed Mother's words, for from it there later on set out many ardent spirits and fluent tongues to sing praises to our Lord and His Holy Mother and disperse the shadows of darkness hovering over an unfortunate nation.

Scarcely had Mechitar taken possession of the place than he wrote to his Eminence Card. Sacripante, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide, to inform him of the singular favour of the Most Serene Republic, and his Eminence replied in kind and encouraging terms. Mechitar then set about making the island habitable. He intended to have no useless expenses and from the first day designed in his mind what the future mother-house was to be like. By the month of November he could write to his dear old friend, Bishop Hovnan who had settled down in Rome on the occasion of the flight from Modon, that he had prepared six habitable cells and was completing seven or eight more by reducing a great building to the plan he had

formed. At the same time he was anxious to get done with it, because the accusations against his missionaries had been brought to Rome by the Vicar-Apostolic and the Cardinal Prefect had thought it best for Mechitar to come to Rome and clear everything up in person, and examine with his own eyes the papers which had come and could not be forwarded to Venice.

CHAPTER XIV

Abbot Mechitar in Rome.

1. Charges against Mechitar's missionaries. — 2. Testimonies in their favour. — 3. Mechitar sets out for Rome. — 4. The Armenians of Leghorn. — 5. Mechitar at Leghorn. — 6. Mechitar in Rome. — Kindness of the Venetian Ambassador. — He conducts Mechitar to the Pope. — 7. Mechitar visits Cardinal Sacripante. — The Cardinal brings him to the Pope. — 8. The list of the accusations. — 9. Clement XI encourages Mechitar and blesses him. — 10. Mechitar's life at Rome. — 11. Friendships and visits. — 12. The defence of Mechitar and his missionaries by Don Bartholomew, Armenian parish-priest of Leghorn. — 13. The Congregation of the Cardinals. — Victory for Mechitar. — 14. Circular of Cardinal Sacripante.

1. Mechitar received the letter of Cardinal Sacripante in the beginning of the month of February, 1717, at a time when he was in great distress for a locality to shelter his Community; yet he replied immediately to the Cardinal Prefect, who had ordered him to recall from the East his two accused missionaries, Fathers George and Joseph, protesting his absolute obedience, and promising to set out for Rome, immediately on the arrival of his missionaries. Meanwhile he wrote to these two, summoning them to Venice and bidding them provide themselves with testimonial letters from the Catholic clergy and laity of the districts where they had preached and taken care of souls.

The Abbot did not know precisely the nature of the charges, but from confidential letters received he knew more or less that they were accused of not obeying the ecclesiastical authorities rightly constituted in the East, of being ignorant, since they had not been educated in the Propaganda College, and that in their sermons they sinned on the subjects of indulgences and sacred images. Mechitar, who knew his sons thoroughly and knew them to be free from such faults, was sore at heart on hearing these calumnies. Certainly his missionaries were not great doctors capable of shaking the world's foundations, but they were not deficient in Catholic doctrine and discipline. In these painful circumstances, just as before, he did nothing but have recourse to prayer, and it was precisely on this occasion that he wrote and set to music that fervent hymn to St. Anthony the Abbot, Protector of the Order, that hymn of a wounded yet resigned heart, which begins thus:

Thee, o holy father Saint Anthony,
From my heart I wish to praise,
Who, though of earth, art shining
Like a bright sun in heaven.

Help us, Saint Anthony,
Bless us, Saint Anthony,
Preserve us, Saint Anthony,
From the enemy in the fight.

The last two couplets are repeated as a refrain after each verse.

In that chant there bursts forth a simple, yet brilliant poetry. Here is an example:

Thou wert the leader of anchorites,
Thou the father of many saints,
Thou the founder of many orders,
And a river of Eden and a source of streams.
Help us, Saint Anthony, etc.

The stars adorn the heavens,
 The flowers beautify the fields
 But the followers of thy life
 Adorn many mountains.

Help etc.

This hymn is the Mechitarian hymn par excellence and for two centuries it has presided at all the sorrows and joys of the Community.

Mechitar, having thus put himself in the hands of God, rose up and cheered his sons.

2. Khatchatur was grieved, too, at the accusations which had reached Rome. He wrote a splendid defence of Mechitar to the Eminent Cardinals of Propaganda and to several Armenian notabilities in the East, calling the Servant of God 'the luminous sun of our country, the propagator of the faith, the shield of Catholic truth'. In one of his letters he was not afraid to assert that 'whoever fights against Mechitar, fights against the Holy Ghost; who-soever strives to destroy Mechitar's work, is labouring in vain, for he is struggling with God'.

Since the Abbot had to go to Rome, all his acquaintances wished to show their interest in the matter by giving him splendid testimonials. Mechitar himself, wishing to follow the example of the great St. Ignatius of Loyola, who demanded from the Inquisitor commendatory letters for himself and his disciples¹, was desirous of having similar documents, from those especially with whom he had long lived in the exercise of the sacred ministry. The nobility of the island of Scio, in the Egean Sea, then residing in Venice, remembering the great, fatherly zeal of the Servant of God, whilst they were at Modon, gave him a letter overflowing with praise of his heroic zeal and his pure Catholic faith. So did the Armenian Catholic priests and laity in Venice, who had personally known his missionaries all over

1. Ribadeneira, Life of St. Ignatius, Bk. II, ch. II.

Asia Minor. In the same strain of unbounded enthusiasm and gratitude wrote the Armenians of Constantinople who had come to Venice, with Mgr. Harutiun at their head, who was born in the Turkish capital and was at that time Archbishop of Cæsarea in Palestine. They even sketched Mechitar's stainless life from his cradle. I think it well to give the text of another letter written in defence of the Mechitarists by Cardinal Cornaro, Bishop of Padua, who was not an Oriental, yet was a personage of the highest dignity and authority in the Church.

Most Reverend, Most Eminent and Most Respectful Sir,

There was lost in the Morea, in the city of Modon, when Catholicity flourished there, a monastery of Armenian monks, which served as a college for the education of Armenians in the *true Catholic rite*. The religious worked in the missions with *great fruit for souls* and to the *great edification* of those people, as has been declared time and again by the public representatives of the Most Serene Republic. There followed on the fatal loss of that kingdom. The Abbot of the monastery, Peter Mechitar by name, went with all his monks to Venice, where they lived an exemplary life in a private house from stipends for Masses. Later the Most Serene Republic presented them with the island of St. Lazarus near Venice and thither they betook themselves. They now wish to fit up the buildings there and make the church convenient for the re-establishment of the work of instructing Armenian youths in the truths of the *Catholic Rite* and of fitting themselves for the Missions. But since the means of commencing the enterprise are wanting, the Abbot has gone there (to Rome) to seek help from the S. C. of Propaganda, for the accomplishment of his holy design. I therefore reverently beseech Your Eminence to grant these good religious the favours which will be suggested by your kind heart, for they deserve them for the exemplary life they lead, as I have learnt from persons worthy of credence. I most humbly kiss your Eminence's hand.

Padua, 27th May, 1718.

Your Eminence's

Most humble, devoted and true Servant,
Card. Cornaro.

3. Meanwhile Abbot Mechitar, with the Father George who had been accused at Rome, and F. John who knew Rome well, left for the Eternal City on the 9th of May. The journey to Ferrara was done in a ship crammed with passengers; thence to Bologna, partly by boat and the rest — 10 miles — in a coach; from here, where he arrived on the 11th May, he went in a calash to Florence, where he arrived two days later. Here he took up his abode in an inn near the Duomo resembling the caravansaries of the Orient, so he writes to a friend. He went to see the illustrious Marquis Ricardi, to whom he had been recommended by the Morosini of Venice, and by whom he was received with a kindly interest. The Abbot intended going to Leghorn and then returning to Florence before proceeding to Rome, so the Marquis asked him to leave behind him such belongings as would not be necessary for the trip down to Leghorn, and take them away on his return. Mechitar consented, and was very grateful to the gentleman for his courtesy. Writing to his vicar in Venice, he extols the grandeur of the marquis' palace, its rich chapel, its artistic gallery, its corridor of silver plate and medals, and many other things.

He then sailed to Leghorn, a city dear to Armenians on account of its numerous colony. The parish-priest (of the Armenians) at that time was Don Bartholomew Vahrad, a former student of the College of Propaganda, who did not know the Servant of God, and so received him with a certain hesitation. But when he learned to appreciate his virtues, he became, like Khatchatur, his great admirer.

4. The Armenian population, which numbered 130 persons, went back to the year 1591, when the Grand Duke Ferdinand, to increase his commerce with the East, invited into his Duchy this enterprising people, so expert in commerce and industry, with whom the inhabitants of Pisa had been in extensive commercial intercourse through the port of Ajas in Armenian Cilicia. Leghorn, like the other

cities of Tuscany, had numerous merchants from Tehulfa, Van, Smyrna and elsewhere. Among the goods in which they principally traded, are mentioned varieties of silk and drapery which they brought from Persia and the Indies. They sold coral also, precious stones, purpurin and various aromatic spices.

Leaving aside the civil life of the Armenian colony at Leghorn, and confining ourselves to treating briefly the religious aspect of the population, I must confess at the outset that Leghorn underwent the same changes as were noticeable in the Armenian nation in the East. Although the Armenians in this city frequented the Latin churches, nevertheless there was a time when the ecclesiastical Visitors from Constantinople (1667-69), endeavoured to withdraw them from their obedience to the Holy See. But, on the protestation of Clement IX, the Grand Duke Ferdinand II sent home the prelates who had come on this mission, and the Armenians submitted to the Dominicans.

There was, however, a continual longing for a church of their own, but the Holy See, who put no trust in the constancy of the Armenians, would not grant it. Nor was it persuaded by the word of honour of the noble Signor Abro, who was ready to guarantee that the church would always be Catholic and even offered to build it at his own expense. But Propaganda, on receiving some information from the Ordinary of the place, still believed it inopportune to accede to this request. Thereupon several Armenians crossed to Venice.

Finally, in the year 1689, all difficulties were removed. In an assembly of Armenian notabilities, the terms were agreed for acquiring the garden of the Franciscan friary, for the expenses of constructing a church. Signor Abro was unanimously elected their delegate for the collection of funds. A tax was put on all oriental and indigenous goods of Armenian merchants, and everything was approved by the Grand Duke. The Franciscan garden was bought for 26,512 francs in 1692, and the Grand Duke gave the rescript for the construction in the same year.

Since the permission of Propaganda was late in coming, the Grand Duke Cosimus III interested himself greatly in the matter. Cardinal De Medici, his brother, gave excellent recommendations to a rich Armenian, Agha de Matus, who set out for Rome, as the delegate of the Armenian colony, to implore the desired permission from the Sacred Congregation. The Holy See imposed eight conditions, which were accepted, and finally, permission was granted on the 8th of March, 1701. One of the conditions was that the parish-priest should be nominated by Propaganda¹.

The first stone was laid on the 23rd of April, 1701, by the Catholicos of Sis, his Beatitude Azaria, who happened to be in Rome at that time, and who was invited for the auspicious occasion. The church was dedicated to St. Gregory the Illuminator, and was consecrated by the Archbishop of Leghorn, Mgr. Francis Frosini, on New Year's day 1714, in the presence of all the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, and to the great joy of all the citizens. The church has continually and regularly had its parish-priests. In Abbot Mechitar's day, the office was filled by Don Bartholomew Vahrad, a famous ex-student of the College of Propaganda, and one who had had great missionary experience in the East.

Mechitar arrived at Leghorn on the 16th of May, and was received gladly and respectfully by the Armenian priest and laity, who did not allow him depart immediately. Until the 26th of the month he stayed in the presbytery as in his own monastery, carrying out with the rector all the functions in church. On the Sunday he preached, bringing great consolation to the faithful and obtaining great fruit for the exaltation of the Catholic faith. Don Bartho-

1. *History of the Armenian colony at Leghorn, and the Construction of the Church*, (in Armenian) by the vardapiet Mesrob Ughurlian, former parish-priest of Leghorn, from authentic documents. Venice 1891. The Mechitarian Printing-Office.

lomew knew the reason of Mechitar's journey to Rome and was really sorry about it. He promised to send a letter to Propaganda on the subject, but



Interior of the Armenian Church at Leghorn.

the Abbot forbade him write immediately, and advised him to write calmly at some later date, when he would be more at his ease. On the 27th the two

friends separated with cordial mutual greetings. Mechitar returned to Florence, hired two calashes for 160 pauls¹, thanked Marquis Riccardi, and on the 29th departed for Rome².

6. The Servant of God, who from his earliest years had ardently longed to go to Rome, and who, in Aleppo, Mytilene, Cyprus and Tuzla had suffered so much, mentally and physically, in his attempts to get there, never thought that the Eternal City would receive him, not as a mere student or cleric or simple monk, but as an Abbot and Founder of a religious Congregation approved by Pope Clement XI, nor that this Pope himself would welcome him and bless him.

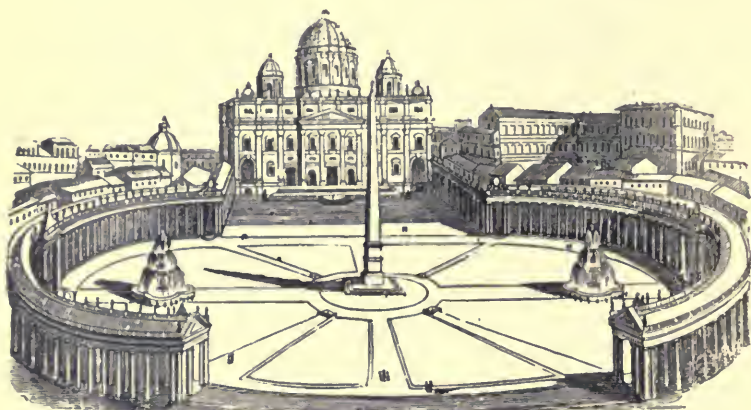
He arrived in Rome on the 2nd of June, and took rooms in a little house near Propaganda. The following day he went to the Venetian ambassador, Nicholas Diedo, with commendatory letters from the Senate, and was received by him in his Palace, with great kindness and veneration. Some days later, on the 10th of June, a date fixed for his being received by his Holiness in solemn audience, the ambassador went there in state, with ten gilt carriages and numerous footmen in livery, and he put the Servant of God and the other two priests in one of the carriages.

The ambassador went in first to see the Pope. When the private audience was over, the three fathers were shown in, and they were moved to tears at finding themselves in the presence of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. The ambassador introduced them, and the Pontiff, who remembered all, was very pleased, and directed various questions to them on the state of their Community and the reasons of their coming to Rome. When he had heard everything, he advised Mechitar to make a full breast of all the

1. A paul is half a franc (Tr.).

2. The particulars of his journey are described minutely in his letters to F. Elias, his vicar at St. Lazarus. In them he does not forget his numerous friends at Venice, lay or ecclesiastical.

circumstances and promised him special interest and attention, as the ambassador had desired. The Holy Father counselled him to see Cardinal Bartolomeo of the Society of Jesus and to relate everything to him minutely. Then he dismissed him with blessings for himself, the other priests present, and for the whole Community. Mechitar went out, deeply touched at the Pope's kindness, and wrote off immediately



St. Peter's, Rome: Church and Piazza.

to his dear friends at St. Lazarus, telling them about the Holy Father's cordial welcome and blessings.

Meanwhile he began his round of visits. First of all he went to the Prefect of Propaganda, who was still Cardinal Sacripante, who had such esteem for Mechitar. He visited and paid his respects to all the Oriental bishops and vardapiets in Rome, among whom was Bishop Hovnan, his intimate friend since boyhood. A week later, the Abbot went with the Cardinal Prefect to see the Pope once more. His Holiness had, in the meantime received minute information on the charges brought forward by the Vicar-Apostolic of Constantinople, who had asked and obtained from Propaganda the prohibition of the apostolate of these Armenian monks in the Levant.

He betrayed real sorrow at hearing the accusations and their disastrous consequences, ordered the Cardinal to present the charges formally to the Abbot, whom he comforted and encouraged like a father. Then he blessed Mechitar from his heart and dismissed him. The Servant of God found Card. Bartolomeo, too, well-disposed and favourably interested. He was sent to the Cardinal with his two companions by the ambassador in an embassy-coach, and this made a great impression on his Eminence, who received Mechitar with special honour, listened to him for over an hour, and promised him his every support.

8. After these visits the Servant of God went to Propaganda and was brought by the Cardinal Prefect to the archives, to that section where is kept the correspondence from the East. There he copied out the accusations of the Vicar-Apostolic in order to answer them. From what he writes in a letter to his Vicar on the 25th of June, the charges were reducible to six — five against some of his missionaries, and one against himself. This latter said that Mechitar had not obeyed the orders of Propaganda, which had intimated to him that he was not to send missionaries to the East. The Servant of God demanded a search to be made on the spot among the archives to see if he had ever received such a command. Nothing could be found, so this accusation fell by itself. The other five, according to the Abbot's letters¹, referred to his missionaries, and asserted:

I. That they busied themselves collecting presents and alms²:

1. He wrote another to F. Elias on the 15th Oct. 1718.

2. This accusation was directed against F. Elias. Some busybody accused him of having exhorted an old maid of Eudocia to make an offering to his Community. Mechitar was always against such offerings, and used to admonish his disciples never to accept them, as we shall shortly see. However this charge reminds me of an exactly similar one

2. That they were ignorant, because they had not studied at the Propaganda College;

3. That they preached without permission¹;

4. That they heard confessions without being authorized to do so;

5. That in their Community there was the false belief that their Abbot had learnt through a heavenly infusion of knowledge, was supernaturally inspired, and that this grace was transmissible to his disciples.

Mechitar, who acted always with sincerity and purity of intention, and whose disciples' souls were transparent to him, was sorely grieved at these specious and unjust charges and made known his sorrow to Card. Sacripante. His Eminence smiled and told him that these accusations had not come from Latins, repeating the Gospel words, 'Thy people and thy priests have betrayed thee'. Then he spoke to the Abbot affably, encouraged him, and said, 'We have received these assertions from your fellow-countrymen, and we have decided to examine everything, that the truth may out, and the accusations cease'. Then he counselled the Abbot to reply to each point in detail.

A few days later, while the Servant of God was in the Armenian Church of St. Mary of Egypt, the Pope, who was on his way to visit some new building, went down to the door of the church, where a goodly number of Armenians and Italians had assembled. The Holy Father caught sight of Abbot Mechitar and his two companions, and made a sign to him to come forward. Then he asked him how his paper was getting on. Mechitar answered that things were going rather slowly, because he had first to write everything in Armenian and then trans-

brought against the great St. Ignatius (cf. Ribadeneira, Bk. III, ch. XIII.) and of which he was declared innocent, like Mechitar, by a public tribunal.

1. This and the following accusations concerned Fathers George and Joseph.

late into Italian. The Pontiff bade him, in a fatherly way, make haste, and was about to enter his carriage again, when the Armenian faithful who were standing by, came forward in the hope of being able to kiss the Pope's feet, and made signs to the Abbot to ask for this favour. Mechitar did so, and the Holy Father granted it, but only to the Armenians. On another occasion, too, the Pope had words of encouragement for the Servant of God, who, shut up in his cell, was intent on his great work.

10. Mechitar found the three rooms he rented near Propaganda, too costly, and unsuitable for the continuance of monastic discipline, so he looked out for a more convenient place elsewhere.

The Armenian people had in Rome, as in other Italian cities, a national hospice and church called St. Mary of Egypt, a gift of Pope St. Pius V in the 16th century. But, since this locality, situated at the foot of the Aventine, was far from Propaganda, and the mid-summer heat and dust of the streets unbearable, it was too much for Mechitar to have to go to the Piazza di Spagna every day. Nor could he hire a cab, as he himself said, because, in his poverty, he could not afford the expense. At St. Mary's there lived several vardapiets and some Oriental bishops, but Mechitar and F. George deemed it advisable to refrain from unnecessary contact with them. F. George was a restless character, and, since he was under an accusation, he had become more suspicious and restless than ever. Now the Abbot would have preferred death to committing a sin. He writes in a letter, 'Even though the Sacred Congregation would be willing, on demand, to pay the expenses, I would not be a load on anyone's hands. Besides I had stipends for Masses from the Venetian ambassador'. Meanwhile he went to the monastery of San Pantaleone, near the church of Sta. Maria ai Monti¹, where he paid thirty francs a month for each room.

1. This monastery took its name from a little chapel near, in honour of St. Pantaleon. It has changed its title,

He had a little cell, as at St. Lazarus, open to the south, which, during that hot season, was like an oven; and under these conditions he had to write. His weak stomach not being able to stand the community – food, he took but a *panata*, i. e. bread moistened with lukewarm water. Nevertheless he was very contented, for, as he wrote to his Vicar, the persons who resided in the monastery were good and virtuous. Since Mechitar and his companions were of a different rite from the others¹, they recited their office apart; only the meditation did they make with the rest. The other religious were accustomed to take the discipline three times a week, and the trio were only too pleased to join in. Mechitar even wrote to F. Elias, ‘O how sweet to our ears is the sound of the scourging. I should not exchange it for that of the harp or the violin’.

In the midst of all these occupations, he paid attention to the building of his monastery at Venice. To form the slightest idea of his awakened capabilities in architecture, one must read his letters to his Vicar, in which he explains minutely the secrets and the beauty of this art, describing the arches, the angles, the staircases and every technical point of the construction. At the same time he wrote

since Benedict XIV, in the year 1748, gave it to the Confraternity of *Our Lady of Good Counsel*, near the ascent to *St. Peter in Chains*. The monastery was kept from the 15th century by the Basilian Greek monks of Grottaferrata, who, in 1635, moved to *St. Venantius*. Their place was taken by a Hospice for priests, and Mechitar was their guest. He knew there some acquaintances from Venice and lived in the place under regular discipline. A similar institution may be seen to-day at Ponte Sisto, called ‘Hundred Priests’, under the direction of the *Concettini*. It is not to be wondered at that many of them took the discipline. This was a common practice in many confraternities, even of lay people. On this convent of St. Pantaleon, cf. Armellini, ‘*Le chiese di Roma*’, 2nd Ed. p. 143.

1. See Appendix IV.

on all that a Founder knows to be necessary for the spiritual progress of his Congregation. He wrote to his missionaries and his friends, he addressed himself in a special way to his clerics at St. Lazarus



Pope Clement XI.

— to those youths who were to form the future embodiment of his cherished work, he greeted them one by one, calling each by his name, he embraced them, saying that they were ‘his sons, his brothers, his spiritual fathers’, and he recommended himself to their prayers. In these letters one saw the father, the abbot, the organizer of everything, humbly assuming the appearance of the last of the brethren,

the lowest of the servants, yet burning with a seraph's love for God, for the Blessed Virgin and for his brethren. It is grand to remember, also, that he always mended his own cassock, and since his poverty only gave him one, when it had to be mended, he would shut himself up in his cell and set himself to the task.

11. In this humility of his, in his poor cell he did not find the hiding-place he sought, for many learned ecclesiastics, particularly Orientals, came to consult him on various subjects, but, above all, on patrology. Among these was Assemani, who bound himself to the Abbot with an intimate and everlasting friendship. Lay people and travellers from the Levant, on their hearing of his being in Rome, hastened to his cell as if it were a little temple for teaching virtue, humility and learning of all kinds. When the Persian Ambassador in France, of Armenian nationality, who, accompanied by a numerous and gorgeous retinue, had come to pay his respects to the Sovereign Pontiff, heard that Abbot Mechitar was in the city, he went with all that retinue in their rich uniforms to greet him in the monastery of St. Pantaleon. The other religious were astonished, and, mistaking the ambassador for the Shah of Persia, congratulated the Abbot on this great honour.

12. But Mechitar had quite different thoughts. Day and night he worked at the preparation of his answers to the accusations. When he had completed the work in Armenian, he had it translated into Italian by a competent person, then he got it printed, and distributed a copy of it to all the Cardinals and Consultors in the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda. He brought a copy of it, too, to the Pope, who was very pleased, and Card. Paolucci, who was present at the audience, spoke words of praise concerning Mechitar and his Congregation, and bade him be present unfailingly at the Congregation of the Cardinals, when the question would be discussed. Mechitar, in all his answers to the accusations, had defended his position, as was his custom, without saying a word of offence or of opposition against his accusers.

In the first few days of the month of August, a letter in his defence came to the Cardinals from Don Bartholomew of Leghorn. His communication opens with an inspired exordium. Then he sings the praises of Mechitar, his piety, his erudition, his zeal, referring for confirmation of his assertions and of Mechitar's orthodoxy to numerous cities in the Orient. Continuing, he explains the exceptional circumstances of the question '*communicatio in divinis*'. He deplores the way of acting followed by the Visiting-Apostolic, Mgr. Galani, who, unable to distinguish between spiritual jurisdiction, which Armenians have not got independently of the Pope, and the sacerdotal character, which they have, made many believe that Armenian schismatic 'priests' were not priests at all. He relates how some Catholic Armenians, deceived by these assertions and blinded by their own ignorance, trampled on the Sacred Host consecrated by schismatics, believing it to be mere bread. He also mentions other terrible and deplorable incidents which it would disgust me to recount. He then observes how the Mechitarists strenuously denounced such conduct, and that, in consequence, their adversaries declaimed against them, alleging that the missionaries defended the schismatic Armenian Church, permitted Catholics to attend its services, and opposed the jurisdiction of the Latin bishop. The zealous priest then goes on to refute the charge preferred by Mgr. Galani and his secretaries, that Mechitar's disciples did not take their orders from the Latin bishop, by showing how the cases in which this actually happened, the missionaries were at a distance of no less than a *forty days' journey*, among barbarous Turks and Infidels, who did not allow free communication with their superiors, and punished these good men with imprisonment or death, as being *Franks* or rebels. The peroration is an eloquent, touching appeal to their Eminences not to condemn the Mechitarist Congregation on these calumnies, which have caused an infinite grief, but to favour them for the great good of the poor Armenian nation.

13. The plenary Congregation of Cardinals was to be held on the 26th of September. That day Mechitar prayed fervently to Our Blessed Lady to reveal the innocence of himself and his missionaries. Then he went to Propaganda, and sat down in the ante-room to await the Cardinals' exit and hear the decision. The Holy Father had sent a special recommendation of Mechitar to Card. Tanara, of Bologna, who was the Protector of the Congregation. The examination and discussion lasted four hours. Every charge was minutely inspected; so was the corresponding defence. In all, over 200 testimonies were read, among which were letters of Cardinals, bishops and various ecclesiastical and civil dignitaries. Sentence was finally pronounced: the full justification of Mechitar and his missionaries, particularly of F. George, who had been declared the most guilty. Then their Eminences began to file out of the council-hall, and, seeing the Abbot in the ante-chamber, congratulated him most affectionately on his complete victory. The decision was brought immediately to the Holy Father, who was awaiting the announcement with paternal anxiety, and he was very pleased at the news, as he afterwards said.

Mechitar, after humbly thanking the Cardinals, thanked also in his heart the God of Truth, and the most holy Virgin Mary, the Protectress of the poor, small Community, and with his mind calm but exultant, he returned to St. Pantaleon's. At that moment the other religious had gone out of the refectory, and were together having recreation. The news of their guest's victory was received with a great and sincere joy by these good men, who had an unbounded reverence and admiration for Mechitar, on account of his holy life, his learning and his singular patristic erudition.

This same joy was manifested by the students of Propaganda, who, hearing in their letters from the East of the accusations brought against Mechitar and his missionaries, had until that day been in a state of perplexity and suspicion, but thence-

forward did not hesitate to express publicly their veneration and their friendliness. One of them, Stephen Asdvazadour of Eudocia, even wrote to the most persistent of the Abbot's enemies, Don John Minas, extolling Mechitar's heroic spirit of forgiveness and exhorting him to fraternal charity.

14. After this victory over the adversaries of his Community, the Servant of God, like a prudent and wary superior, determined to seize from the enemy's hand the powerful weapon of offence with which they had struck and might again strike his missionaries, by accusing them of being ignorant. He therefore asked the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda that his missionaries, before going to the East, be examined by the Apostolic Nuncio in Venice. Card. Sacripante found the proposal doubly prudent, both as regards the ecclesiastical authorities in the East, and the candidates for examination, and this plan of the Abbot was inserted in the decree by which the work of Mechitar and his missionaries was justified. A copy was sent to the Vicar-Apostolic at Constantinople and to other competent authorities, and statutes were laid down to regulate the obtaining of jurisdiction in districts far removed from the episcopal residence.

Mechitar, writing about all this success to F. Elias, his vicar at St. Lazarus, added that God had done it all, 'to Whom be all honour and glory; to us the duty of thanking and praising Him'.

CHAPTER XV.

The Question of the *Communicatio in divinis*.

1. Proposal of Cardinal Tanara to Abbot Mechitar. — The Question of communicating or cooperating with schismatics in religious functions (*Communicatio in divinis*). — 2. Special civil-religious conditions of the Armenians. — 3. The Roman Pontiffs and the Catholicos of Armenia. — 4. Patriarchs with civil power at Constantinople. — Their overbearance. — 5. The Armenian Catholics of Persia. — 6. The opinions of Abbot Mechitar and the Doctor of Theology Khatchatur sent to the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office. — 7. Decree of Clement XI. — 8. Mechitar and Assemani. — 9. The last audience of Mechitar with the Sovereign Pontiff. — His departure for Venice. — 10. At St. Lazarus attending to the wants of his Community. — 11. New missions in the Levant and in Transylvania. — 12. His troubles. — 13. Accused at Rome. — 14. His letter of defence to their Eminences the Cardinals. — 15. The end of the question of the *Communicatio in divinis* with the schismatics.

1. After the sentence given by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda, at the happy termination of all the trouble, Mechitar was preparing to return to his monastery at Venice, whither urgent matters called him, and he had already written announcing the day of his departure, when another circumstance cropped up to prolong his stay in Rome.

There having spread through the various Congregations the news of his case, his victory, the sanctity of his life, his patristic erudition, his prud-

ence and his experience in Oriental affairs, Cardinal Tanara, who had been the beloved protector of the Community all during the trial, came to see him and urged him with great persistency to remain yet a while in Rome, and to draw up a document in which to lay bare sincerely and freely his conscientious opinion of the difficult question then being discussed at the Holy office and at Propaganda, on the intercommunication between Catholic and schismatic Armenians under Turkish rule in matters of religion.

Two questions particularly agitated the minds of all.

I. Can one enter an Armenian schismatic church?

II. And under what circumstances?

Many missionaries in the East had petitioned the Holy Father on the point and the Pontiff before passing sentence in the matter wished to be fully informed as to the conditions of Armenian Catholics in Turkish provinces, and 'no one', said Card. Tanara to the Servant of God, 'knows the question more thoroughly, and no one better than you can render such singular service to the Holy See'.

Mechitar, though very anxious to return to his beloved island some days before, being expected there with great jubilee, nevertheless could not refuse the proposal, and that both owing the dignity of the person who made it and on account of the great good which would thereby accrue to the Catholic religion. He therefore accepted the invitation and set himself to the arduous task.

To understand well what were the exceptional circumstances in which Armenian Catholics of Asia Minor were placed with regard to Armenian schismatics, one must seek light from certain political and historical data.

After the Persians had destroyed in Greater Armenia the Armenian kingdom of the Arshaguni dynasty (A. D. 478), and at the end of the reign of the Bacratuni dynasty through the Arab domination (A. D. 1078), Greater Armenia remained under Persian rule, and Lesser Armenia fell to the Arabs, but,

finally, it was conquered by the Turkish emperors. Persia from the first day of her supremacy did her utmost to destroy Christianity, whence came those barbarous and bloody wars of the fifth century, in consequence of which there fell martyrs for the faith, famous generals like Vardan and his companions — all of them princes, governors and heads of dynasties — and there also spilt their blood patriarchs, bishops, doctors, theologians, priests, soldiers, and many others, both men and women. Then arose in Cilicia the reign of the Rubinian dynasty (A. D. 1080), which resisted the Sultans of Egypt and the Carman until the year 1313. But then it fell, and its last king was Leo V, who abdicated and died in Paris, as we saw in Chapter XIII.

The Arabs, and after them the Turks, accomplished in Lesser Armenia what the Persians had done in Greater Armenia, and they made lakes and rivulets with the blood of martyrs and innocent babes, in their hatred of the faith of Christ.

On the other side the Armenians were held in aversion and were persecuted by the Greeks who wished to see the Armenian Church form a part of their own, and the Armenians refusing, there followed enmities and persecutions.

3. During all these political changes and disturbances, what preserved the unity of the nation was its religion with the Catholicos at its head. The See of the Catholicos from the time of St. Gregory the Illuminator was Etchmiadzin, but when the fierce Persian invasions burst forth it was transferred to Ivin (465), thence to Aramons on account of the Arab vexations (729), and afterwards by reason of the persecutions to Sebaste, Ani, Aktamar and other places successively, and in the year 1113 to Hromgla in Cilicia. However, in 1441, the bishops and vardapiets of Greater Armenia gathered together and elected a Catholicos at Etchmiadzin in opposition to the one at Cilicia, which continued to be independent of Etchmiadzin. Amongst the Catholicos of Greater Armenia many held different views about the Council of Chalcedon and Pope St. Leo the Great.

On account of their political afflictions, of the numerous persecutions, invasions, massacres and many other such mishaps they were physically impeded from regular intercourse with the Church of Rome. It was the famous Catholicos Gregory *Martyrophilos* who wrote a most beautiful letter to the great Pope Gregory VII on the question of union and received a truly fraternal reply.

When the Catholicos had their residence in Cilicia, encouraged by the Crusaders they opened up obsequious relations with the Holy See, and also because they were near the sea-board and not far distant from the ports visited by ships of the Italian Republics. No Catholicos wrote so many inspired verses on St. Peter and his See as the angelic, the sublime, the grand pastor and poet St. Nerses Shenorhali (*The Gracious*) 1098-1173, the boast and the pride of the Armenian nation. A part of his works has been translated into Latin and various European languages¹.

The venerable historian and vardapiet Vardan (13th century) narrates that the Catholicos Gregory Deghà in the last years of the 12th century wrote a letter, professing communion, to Pope Lucius and that he received in return an affectionate epistle along with the pallium and mitre. From that period the Catholicos and the Armenian bishops began to wear the mitre, whereas formerly they used to wear a veil with gold fringes. In that brotherly letter the Pontiff admitted the difficulties of interrelation and wrote, 'it is a long journey from me to my brother, the Patriarch of the Armenians'; and the great archbishop St. Narses of the Princes of Lambrone adds that in that letter there were also written the following words, 'To thee, brother Patriarch (I send) the Pallium which is the highest honour, and my mitre, the ornament of the church; and receiving these

1. An inspired prayer of his has been printed in 36 languages by the printing-press of the Mechitarists of Venice.

from us, just as you shall be adorned with them in this world so shalt thou be fortified and shine with them in the next' (3rd Dec. 1186).

We should be wandering beyond the limits of our present work, were we to enumerate the Catholicos who wrote to the Popes. When Eugene IV (1439) invited the Catholicos Constantine V to the Council of Florence, he received in reply the following communication, 'I should have liked to send a number of vardapiets and bishops, but through fear of the infidels I cannot, and so I despatch the above-mentioned vardapiets (Sergius and Thomas). Whatever you decide upon with them I shall pay a willing attention to and accept'¹. In a preceding letter the delegate of the Catholicos at Constantinople wrote to the Pontiff explaining the numerous obstacles to the sending of his envoy to the Catholicos, 'Our people are scattered throughout the territories of barbarians and infidels. Nay more, what is most miserable, we have become the slaves and tributaries of Turks or Tartars'. The Pope in his Bull '*Exultate*' praises the Armenians who, disregarding the great intervening distance and the multiplicity of dangers, had sent 'wise and venerable' delegates.

The Roman Pontiffs, who knew well how things stood, excused this nation disturbed by so many political disasters and persecutions, and did their best to maintain them in the unity of the faith. Often these rare correspondences were made in secret and by means of delegates. We have already had occasion to observe how many Armenian bishops or vardapiets used to pass through Venice on their way to Rome, bearers of some letter, or a message by word of mouth, when they were in danger of

1. *B. Mansi. Conciliorum Collectio*. Vol XXX. 642. The historian Tchamitchian mentions as being present at the Council, the vardapiets Sergius and Thomas and a Bishop Joachim. But in the Acts of the Council only the first two names figure. *History of the Armenians*. Vol III. p. 478. — Balgian, *History of Catholicism in Armenia*. Chap. IX.

being searched. The Sovereign Pontiffs received them with open arms and were anxious to help them. Gregory XIII wished to build a college for the education of Armenian youths, and on that occasion (1584) promulgated that splendid Bull which is a most glorious and outspoken testimony of the esteem and affection which the Pope had for the Armenian nation, 'The Armenian nation great, and almost infinite, in numbers, celebrated by its antiquity and its lofty name, praiseworthy above all the peoples in the Orient for its zeal and its constant adherence to the Christian religion..... at all times with great veneration devoted to the Roman Pontiff as to the true Vicar of Christ, successor of St. Peter, acknowledging him to be the head of the Catholic Church, following his doctrine¹ and discipline, and its Patriarchs submitting themselves to the Apostolic See, ... whence it ought certainly to be to Us and the Apostolic See most dear and most acceptable..... etc²'.

What more splendid or more consoling acknowledgement could be given by the Popes to the people and the Catholicos! Leaving aside some Catholicos of whom we have spoken elsewhere, the others, when an occasion presented itself, wrote to Rome, keeping up good relations until 1701, when Pope Clement XI wrote the friendly letter to the Catholicos Nahapiet which we saw in Chap. II. There is yet another letter to the Catholicos Alexander I (1707) of the Pope himself, who writes to show his displeasure at some errors which have crept into the Armenian profession of faith³. Then there suddenly cease these fraternal, obsequious communica-

1. These words are worth noting. They will decide an important question in Appendix VI.

2. Roman Bullarium. Tome IV. part IV. p. 78. Ed. Rome. Charles Cocquelines 1747.

3. To this Patriarch is even ascribed a by no means indifferent share in the persecutions we are going to describe.

tions and there begin, particularly at Constantinople, a series of persecutions of Catholic Armenians at the hand of various Patriarchs residing in that capital.

4. The origin of these civil-religious Patriarchs goes back to Mahomet II (1453). This prince on conquering Byzantium brought there an Armenian colony to extend the commerce. He appointed as its head Bishop Joachim of Brussa, an old acquaintance of his, and conferred on him the title *Patrik* with the prerogatives enjoyed by the Greek *Patrik*. What is more, remarking the Greeks' detestation of his authority, he intended to make everyone see that another Christian patriarch was subservient and faithful to him. This patriarch, besides his religious faculties, was possessed also of civil authority, e. g. he had the register of the civil state, baptism, matrimony (with the right to bless marriages), and deaths, and the right of inhumation. To these were added others, such as the first judiciary trial of cases concerning wills and inheritances, and he had a sort of temporary prison.

Then the Patriarch of Constantinople was a kind of intermediary between the government and the provinces, whose pastors also received a civil investiture from the Government by means of a rescript (*Berat*) and were somewhat of the nature of delegates of the patriarchate. Only in matters of dogma did they depend on the Catholicos, nor could they consecrate bishops. This power has been exercised until the present day more or less in the same way.

Several of these patriarchs hated those Armenians who wanted to obey the Church of Rome. Some through phenomenal ignorance and others through malice and perversion cursed the Holy Council of Chalcedon and Pope St. Leo as favouring Eutyches, persecuted those priests and laity who would not anathematise them, and even went so far as to sing on all the festivals of the Holy Patriarchs a hymn of malediction, a late introduction into the Armenian hymnary.

The first to raise his voice in public against these enormities was Mechitar, while still a deacon, later on Khatchatur and then other priests. From that time onwards there began to appear a separating line — though not official — between the Catholic laity and clergy and the schismatics. The faithful who were of Catholic principles, were scandalised at hearing the maledictions thrown at a Sacred Council and a saintly Pope, and did not wish to frequent the national churches for fear of hearing these blasphemies. Some would go secretly to the Latin church, but trembling all the while lest they should be denounced to the government, there being as yet no separate Armenian Catholic churches. When the people ceased attending the anathematising churches, the rents, the offerings, the income decreased, and then the schismatic clergy gave themselves a shaking and had recourse to coercion to bring back their flock to their own churches and prohibit them from entering Latin ones. Those who did not come they accused of being *Franks* who had relations with the West against the empire and so rebels to the government. Then there began the hunt and the persecution of Catholics, both laity and priesthood. We have already witnessed the persecutions set on foot against Mechitar and other priests, and the glorious martyrdom of Ter Comitas and Ter Michael of Sebaste.

On the other hand there were cases, such as baptism, matrimony and burial under the patriarch's sole control and recognised by the government, in which Catholics, willing or no, were obliged to go to the anathematising churches in order not to leave their children unbaptised and so without official recognition — which brought with it serious consequences — nor their dead unburied at home for several days. Yet in going there they were afraid of committing sin. Still they could not help it, because the Turks were jealous on this point, demanding that everyone follow his own religion and obey his own priests, otherwise he would have to become mahometan. If an Armenian priest reported one of the faithful for

not bringing his child to the Armenian church to be baptised, the Turkish government sent on the spot one of their sacred ministers to perform the mahometan rite of circumcision and make the child Islamitic. Similarly were a Catholic accused of not going to the Armenian church for the blessing of his marriage, the Turkish authorities sent someone to bless it in the Islamitic rite, and did the same for interment¹. To add to this, Armenian priests would not readily administer these sacraments, unless those who asked for them had been seen in their church several times a year. The rich who had money obviated all difficulties, but the poor were often expelled or compelled to profess an erroneous faith by anathematising the Council of Chalcedon and St. Leo. If a priest of Catholic sentiments administered in secret the above sacraments in some private house (burial was out of the question) he was condemned to the galleys if it became known. Mechitar's disciples often exposed themselves to such dangers.

5. So much for the Armenians in Turkey. The Armenians in Persia enjoyed a certain liberty, there being no Catholic Armenian churches there, and they could attend the Latin churches, nor were they persecuted by the government or the Catholicos. The Holy See had by a special decree forbidden the Catholic Armenians of Ispahan and Julfa from frequenting the sacraments in schismatical or heretical churches².

1. Letter of Don Bartholomew Vahrad, Armenian missionary, formerly student of the Propaganda College, Rome. — Letter of Khatchatur, vartapiet (1718) Apostolic Delegate for the Armenians, former student of the same college.

2. Here is a copy of the decree for Persia, communicated by the Assessor of the Sacred Congregation of Universal Inquisition (Holy Office).

Thursday, 28th Nov, 1709.

Sixth Doubt.

If Armenian missionaries can enter the churches of

Now many Catholic missionaries in Turkey had addressed themselves to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda asking for clear instructions, desiring not to betray the Armenian Catholics by exposing them to persecutions, imprisonment and danger of their lives, and at the same time wishing to preserve their faith. The missionaries, theologians and preachers were divided into two camps. One said, 'The *communicatio in divinis* with heretics and schismatics being forbidden by the divine law, it could not under any circumstances be admitted.' The other maintained, 'The *communicatio in divinis* is indeed forbidden by the divine law, but it is not stated exactly when this prohibition becomes part of the ecclesiastical law'. The Church herself can determine the limits; hence in certain cases and under certain circumstances, when there is no scandal or fear of perversion, the Church can grant dispensations, as for example in mixed marriages and certain mixed processions as we saw in Morea. The Franciscan Fathers, the Maronite priests, according to the communications of the Armenian Catholics of Aleppo 'permitted Catholics to go to the schismatical churches for baptism, matrimony ad burial,' without of course making profession of some false sect. Those who showed themselves rigorous on the absolute divine right, through fear of imprisonment would not assume the responsibility of administering the sacraments. To accuse a priest as dissident was very easy. Yet a way was to be shown. There

the schismatics and heretics, and if Catholics can receive the sacraments from them, assist at their Masses and other functions. This is asked because the missionaries hold different views in Aspaana and Julfa, some saying that it is lawful in this matter as in others mentioned above, by reason of a Bull of Martin V and of the Council of Constance, which permits(?) the faithful to receive the sacraments from heretics and schismatics who are not specially denounced as such by name, such as are not the bishops and priests of Aspaan and Julfa'.

was the difficult question which Cardinal Tanara put before Mechitar for him to clear up and express his opinion on, according to the laws of Catholic theology. The same question was put to Khatchatur who was now parish-priest at Venice.

6. Mechitar wrote his answer first in Armenian, then had it translated into Italian, and presented it to the Holy Office where it always remained the original copy, never seen by profane eye in that Congregation. In that dissertation Mechitar did nothing else but follow the thesis of the learned Pyrringh, of the great, immortal Pope Benedict IV. Adapting the instructions to the case of the Armenians in Turkey, he deduced that the decree for the Armenians in Persia (28th Nov. 1709) could not be said to extend to those in Lesser Armenia.

What was printed later as a copy or translation of the Abbot's work is either the fruit of some imagination or at the best a trimming-up of the rough copy he made in Armenian and left among his papers¹. Even these papers after undergoing a diligent inspection were found not to belong to the Servant of God.

After Mechitar's opinion had been handed in, there arrived that of Khatchatur in writing, and both were in harmony.

7. Then Pope Clement XI, having heard the opinions of the Cardinals of the Holy Office, in a solemn sitting at which he himself presided 12th Jan.

(Answer) To the sixth doubt: 'In the negative and let decrees be published'.

1. I am in a position to state that in this category is partly to be included what an ex-Mechitarist of Vienna, F. Luke Derderian, published at Smyrna in 1879, printed from a posthumous manuscript found, one does not know how, in their library at Vienna, with the title, 'Reasons against those who say that no one may go into Armenian churches, written by Mechitar Abbot.' In the Archives of the Mechitarists of Venice, where the Servant of God lived and died, and where all his writings are preserved, no copy exists nor any record of a contemporaneous Father.

At Rome in the Church of Our Lady of Victories



TO SEBASTIAN ANTHONY TANARO OF BONONIA,
CARDINAL PRIEST OF THE HOLY ROMAN CHURCH,
WHO FIRST A UNDER-NUNCIO AT BRUSSELS,
THEN TO THE PORTUGUESE AND TO LEOPOLD CAESAR
NUNCIO OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE
DIED AT ROME, 4th MAY, 1724, AGED 74,
BENEDICT XIV, SOVEREIGN PONTIFF,
TO AN EXCELLENT CITIZEN AND A MOST KIND FRIEND
RAISED THIS MONUMENT.

1719, promulgated the decision on the *communicatio in divinis* with the schismatics.

Here is the decree in its integrity:

In a general meeting of the Holy Roman Universal Inquisition held in the apostolic palace on the Quirinal hill in the presence of Our Most Holy Lord Clement XI by divine providence Sovereign Pontiff, and the most eminent and most reverend Sirs, Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, specially deputed by the Apostolic See as general inquisitors against heretical malice through the whole Christian Republic,

The following three doubts have been handed in on behalf of the Armenian Monks at Venice, to the Sacred Congregation for the propagation of the faith and by it remitted to the Holy Office, viz:

1. If it is lawful for Armenian Catholics to attend schismatical churches, since they otherwise cannot without danger of death receive baptism, contract matrimony, or bury their dead;

2. If, supposing that it is not lawful, some confessing their sins, can be absolved without there being demanded from them an explicit oath that they will not go there again;

3. If the following prudent expedient is lawful: that Catholics can enter the churches of schismatics through curiosity, which cannot be done without stopping to assist at their functions as profane representations, without however praying, or adoring the Blessed Sacrament interiorly, but merely exteriorly in order not to be insulted or maltreated in person by the schismatics;

Our Most Holy Lord, the above-mentioned Pope, having heard the judgments of the Eminent Lords, answered, 'Consult Doctors' and upright men and learned ecclesiastics who have long lived in those missions, abstaining altogether from acts by which they would profess a false sect, and from the occasion of scandal and perversion.

Joseph Barrolo,

Notary of the Holy Roman Church
and of the Universal Inquisition.

This by no means negative or absolute sentence as some Orientals declared it to be, raised a tremendous storm against Mechitar, chiefly because the decree mentioned him as appealing (without their knowing it) and so he was believed to be the instigator of this reserved sentence of the Holy See. Hence those fiery attacks which we shall witness soon. When this decree came to light, Mechitar had already departed from Rome.

8. During his stay in Rome the celebrated Maronite patrist, Joseph Simeon Assemani, who, as he says himself, had heard from some Armenian that in St. Lazarus' library there was an Armenian translation of the work ascribed to St. James of Nisibis, came to see our Abbot, whom he calls 'a man famed for piety and learning and a very great friend of mine'¹ advised him to transcribe a copy of it and offer it to the Pope for the Vatican library. Mechitar wrote immediately to his vicar-general in Venice, had a handsome copy made and artistically bound, and at his departing audience offered it to the Holy Father whom it pleased very much².

On that occasion the Pope gave the Abbot indulgences, crosses and medals and for himself a medal with a plenary indulgence for the hour of death. He presented him also with the most precious and salutary gift imaginable: a particle of the wood of the Holy Cross. Finally with the outpourings of his heart he blessed the Abbot, his companions and his distant monks; he comforted him and sent by him words of comfort to his sons at St. Lazarus. Mechitar left the rooms of the Pontiff deeply moved and encouraged. On his exit from the Vatican he immediately paid all his parting visits, thanking

1. *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Tome I, p. 557, Ed. Rome, 1719-1728.

2. From this copy the editor Antonelli afterwards published the work of St. James. Bardenhewer (*Manual of Patrology*, Vol. II. n. 81, 82), does not mention whence came such a work into the Vatican library.

everyone from the Venetian Ambassador, their Eminences the Cardinals and the Armenian bishops down to the Armenian students in the Propaganda College. On the 6th of December he set out for Venice by Loretto where he broke his journey to thank in the little Nazareth house the Blessed Virgin for all the graces she had showered upon his adopted children. Thence he passed to Padua to express his gratitude to the bishop of that city, Cardinal George Cornaro, for the gracious letter of recommendation which he sent to Rome, and on the 20th of December he arrived in Venice, at his dear little island of St. Lazarus, adorned with new constructions made in his absence in accordance with the minute indications he had forwarded.

It is not easy to depict the genuineness and the intensity of the joy experienced by all the monks, from the eldest to the youngest. Many wept in their exultation at seeing again the father who had safely harboured them through such storms. They looked on him as returning from the New Jerusalem with branches of palm and olive, of victory and peace, with the blessings and indulgences and gifts to each monk from Pope Clement XI, that great affectionate Father.

10. Like the father of a family, on his return from a long and weary journey undertaken for the welfare of his children and their future happiness he never grew tired of questioning them about their health or their domestic affairs, and interested himself in the smallest and most insignificant things. He was never fatigued in relating his labours, his vicissitudes or his paternal efforts crowned with the blessing of the Lord. Scarcely had he arrived when he set about his various duties with his usual activity and assiduity, as if he had suffered nothing and as if for months and months he had lived in a perfect tranquillity of mind.

After relating minutely the kind welcomes and blessings of the Holy Father, after repeating to all the encouragement he had received, he wished in his turn to be informed minutely of how the mo-

nastic discipline and the observance of the rules proceeded, and what progress was being made in spiritual things and in the studies he had recommended. Happy at the good news he received, he encouraged all, old and young, but especially the latter because they were the hope of the holy work. Scarcely had he recovered from the fatigues of his journey, than he took in hand the reins of the Congregation, confident in the Lord and invoking the intercession of the Most Blessed Virgin.

Since he himself had learnt everything by reading spiritual books, and knew that for monks and young Levites spiritual books were necessary as their spiritual food which would strengthen their soul and guide them in the way of the Lord, so with great eagerness and solicitude he set about preparing various publications with the aid of the elder priests. In the meantime he had printed 'The Spiritual Garden' of Blessed Albert the Great and 'Christian Meditations' that every monk might have a copy and profit by their frequent perusal. He did not think of his monks alone but of his own country also, and so had these books conveyed to his fellow-countrymen. It is impossible to describe the enthusiasm and the transport of these latter in reading these books, or with what love they then sought from him light and counsel in spiritual and liturgical matters. There bear witness to this the innumerable letters which he received, beginning with those from the Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Poland down to the humblest Armenian cleric far away. As by magic all eyes were turned towards Venice and soon St. Lazarus became the spiritual centre of the apostolate, and the intellectual beacon for the Armenian nation.

Amongst this care for spiritual and intellectual concerns he did not neglect what pertained to the glory of God and the dignity of religion. With small savings he began to enlarge the church and construct a suitable choir where the sacred functions could be carried out with greater solemnity and majesty. He himself did not disdain to teach the

young fathers and the students liturgical chants, in order that the Divine Office, besides being exteriorly becoming, might serve to stimulate the ardour of the monks for prayer and choir-service. The foundation of his Congregation was and always had to be the service of the Lord, and the instructions, missions and other good works were to gush out from their love of God.

11. After seeing to the observance of monastic discipline he set himself about fulfilling the fourth vow of the Community, that of the *Apostolate*. Already from all sides fervent prayers and supplication for missionaries were raining in on him. Just then Dr. Khatchatur was being sent as apostolic visitor to the Armenians of Transylvania and the Crimea. He asked and obtained from the Abbot permission to bring with him F. Lazarus, an exemplary monk and one zealous for the cure of souls. The people of Gherla, one of the three Armenian cities of Transylvania in which the people and the authorities were Armenian and enjoyed many special privileges from the government, were very enthusiastic when they heard the apostolic visitor speak of Abbot Mechitar and his Community. The clergy, the authorities and the notabilities wrote to him immediately the following letter:

Most Revered Abbot of the Armenian Religious,

We, the priests of Gherla, the Rector and the twelve Lords of this city, first of all kiss your hand and that of your doctors, and we pray that the All-powerful will keep you and yours from all evil, for His glory and the good of our nation. We have heard from the Very Rev. Doctor Catchadur that your doctors go among Armenians to preach the truth and the word of God. We, Armenians also and sons of the truth, have recourse to your clemency in order that, as Dr. Catchadur has permitted us, you may deign to send us immediately two of your doctors. Moreover concerning our state and devotion, as also the respect due to your doctors, and their maintenance and whatever else relates to these matters, you can obtain information from Dr. Catchadur and your beloved son, Dom Lazarus, who

both well know how we received them. We do not wish to praise ourselves vainly, but we wish those who have seen everything with their own eyes to communicate all to your Paternity. We omit further useless speech because few things suffice the wise.

Now begging from heaven for you and your whole community every prosperity, spiritual as well as corporal, and kissing your sacred right hand and that of your doctors, and recommending ourselves and all our city to your worthy prayers and your Holy Masses,

We declare ourselves

In Gherla, in the year of the Lord, 1719,
on the 28th of September,

Of your most honoured Paternity

The most humble and most devoted Servants,

I, Don Lazarus Budakian
of the Armenians of Transylvania,

I, Don Nerses,

I, Don Minas Torossian,

I, Kacig, Rector of Agozpa,

(L. S.) I, Birov (Governor) of Gherla, Solomon Toderi with
my twelve counsellors.

But it was not merely the Armenian clergy who had recourse to the Abbot. The letter which we transcribe below gives us an idea of the estimation he was held in by the highest amongst the Latin clergy in the East.

Very Rev. Father,

When not long ago by the permission of Divine Providence I came to the East to feed the flock committed to my care, a short time only had I dwelt here when from many lips I heard what wonders God had worked through the ministry of your Reverence for the salvation of your countrymen. So I find it difficult to express the consolation I felt and the thankful prayers I poured forth to God in my joy and exultation at hearing of so many people, formerly shrouded in the darkness of heresy and the obstinacy of schism, and wandering from the right path of salvation, but finally opening their eyes to the salutary light of your exhortations and being converted. I cannot refrain from rejoicing with your Reverence at such wonderful works of

your faith and at the glorious fruit with which God, the supreme bestower of all good gifts, deemed your indefatigable zeal and strenuous labours worthy of being rewarded. Let your Reverence continue and perfect the work you have so laudably and successfully begun, and that such marvellous results may not only remain undiminished but that by God's grace they may daily increase, do not cease instructing in sacred doctrine earnest disciples, imitators of your zeal, so that adorned with all the virtues that distinguish apostolic men they may water where your Reverence has sown. Greatly do I wish that your Reverence would send such labourers into the vast harvest-field committed to our care and destitute of labourers. What a consolation such workmen would bring us! How light they would make the burden placed on our weak shoulders! We are firmly persuaded that many Armenians in our flock, were they enlightened by the sermons of such priests, would lay aside their obstinacy and would not shun the sweet yoke of the Catholic faith. Receive kindly this entreaty of ours and be so good as to write back, as soon as your Reverence can, to one of our residences. Though I write in Latin, your Reverence may answer in Armenian. I hope indeed that no one is more at your disposal, nor venerates you more than

Dominic Mary,
Bishop of Babylon.

Shamakia. New Year's Day, 1720.

The first to be sent on the Eastern mission were FF. Gabriel and Philip, the former to Erzerum, remaining at Trebizond, the second to preach in Ancyra, Eudocia, Sebaste and Amassia.

According to the new regulations they were first examined by the apostolic nuncio at Venice in the doctrines necessary for missionaries to know, then the Abbot had words of encouragement for them, reminding them above all to aim at the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Whereupon he brought them to the chapel, where they recited the prayers for a journey. Then they knelt down, received their superior's blessing — a token of the will of God — embraced all the brethren, recommending themselves to their prayers, and afterwards set out from the island. They were escorted from

the convent in a little boat which brought them to a Venetian frigate, weighing anchor for the East, and bearing the orders of the Dominant Republic to distant seas, to the scattered isles of the Ionian and Egean Seas. They had received orders from the Abbot to present themselves to the Vicar-Apostolic immediately on their arrival at Constantinople. He even recommended them warmly to Don John who had always been one of the adversaries of Mechitar's missionaries, being a former student of the Propaganda College and believing that it was impossible to be educated elsewhere.

Close on the footsteps of these two came F. Paul for a mission at Constantinople and F. Thomas, a zealous monk who was to visit Ancyra, Eudocia, Aleppo and Aintap, and stop a while at Diarbekir. In those days when Catholic priests were rare, Mechitar defined the length of their residence in each city.

What great fruit resulted from these missions is attested by the numerous letters of the native clergy and laity, in part already published in the book of 'Documents'. We think it advisable to transcribe one of them here.

Let it be known to Your Most Venerated Lordship

That, though we had many things to write to your magnanimity, still we thought it more necessary to speak to you merely concerning our Dr. James who for a long time bore calamities, tribulations, persecutions and torments for thirteen years, dressed as a peasant. In various ways he succeeded in the vineyard of the Lord, in Erzerum, in Kurdistan, in Basen and in Kodorchur, but much more in Erzerum and in the surrounding villages, among priests and people, so that between thirty and forty priests have been travelling around at his orders. Many of these priests have been gained over by himself and a great number of the laity. We were abandoned before now and there was no one who could work according to our needs; and yet the Latin missionaries write to the Holy Congregation that they have converted many. We do not write this in our own praise but merely to inform you. Therefore Dr. Jam-

es since boyhood desired and longed to come to the most copious source of wisdom, and not only he, but all the people and the priests wish for it, and yet do not achieve it. We ask your most illustrious person to console him, our father, when he comes to you. Know also that we congratulate Dr. Gabriel, we return him thanks and we satisfy his desires. We are very pleased with the theological books which your excellency has composed, translated and has sown among our Armenian people, where with you have enlightened the darkness of the mind's eye of many and have filled with fragrance the fields of our hearts.

Written in Erzerum.

April 8th 1722,

Ready to serve you,
Peter Basckelian, Priest

We, Peter Baptista Mauri, of the Order of Minors of Stricter Observance, by the grace of God and the favour of the Holy See, Archbishop of Carthage, Vicar Apostolic in the Patriarchate of Constantinople,

To our dearly-beloved friend in the Lord, Mr. James of Erzerum, Catholic Vartabiet, priest and missionary send greeting.

Since you urgently asked from Us permission to depart from hence and in your devotion go to Rome to visit the thresholds (ad Limina) of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, We, benignly consenting to your entreaties, with this letter dismiss you with the blessing of God, testifying that, as far as we know, you are not fettered by any bond of excommunication or suspension. We furthermore testify that you have been in these missions nine whole years and have worked unceasingly as a faithful minister of Christ, in sound doctrine, integrity of life and the good of souls. We therefore commend you in the Lord to all Superiors and all good Christians that they may, on your coming and going, receive you kindly, cherish you and supply your wants as to a faithful servant of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Farewell, and remember to pray to God for us.

Given at Pera, in Constantinople, 25th July, 1722.

Brother P. B. Mauri Archb. Carth. and Vicar, as above,

(L. S.)

Joseph Tamagus pro-secret.

Since the Very Rev. Dr. Gabriel, who was sent by Abbot Mechitar to this city of Theodosipol (Erzerum), has the intention of departing, we have decided to give to everyone a testimony of him and his probity as a recompense for the spiritual services we have received from him. Well then, this Doctor contrived above all things to sow in the souls of the reasonable the seed of the word of God, not departing in his teaching from the paths of Holy Scripture nor in its explanation from the interpretation of the Holy Fathers; and he strove continually to extirpate the sect of heretics and to plant in the minds of the ignorant the holy Roman faith. Moreover he led an honest and irreprehensible life the whole time he remained in this city, and was a shining example to all. Finally, unhesitatingly did he succour Catholics in their spiritual wants, and as far as he could, he stood by us with unwearying vigilance, day and night, during the heretics' persecution. For brevity's sake we pass over his other excellent qualities which will be better known and appreciated by such pious people as you. Therefore, I, Don Peter, I, Don Narses, and I, Don Melchisedech, we who for a long time have been the parish-priests of the (Armenian) Catholics in the city of Theodosipol, witness to all the words written above, by voice, writing and the impress of our seals.

In the year 1722, September 29.

(Here follow the seals).

In this tone there are many more letters referring to the missionaries of this time, and it will be well to quote one more from Aleppo. We omit others from Prchinigh, Eudocia and Sebaste, whose inhabitants address themselves to the Abbot with the affectionate expression of 'Your brothers'.

To the Most Rev. Sir, Abbot Mechitar, Doctor in Theology and our most merciful spiritual father in the Lord.

The salutation recommended by Christ we offer to you, kissing with profound humility your sacred right hand, and together we lay bare to your paternal clemency the anguish of our afflicted hearts, and we pray you to behold our misery and emotion, and intercede for us with the Sacred Congregation that it may deliver us from the contradictions

of the priests of different orders on the question of entering Armenian schismatic churches. For the Franciscan and the Maronite priests who now for a long time have been domiciled here, understand the circumstances we are in and let us go, but other priests of other orders hold different views and prohibit us. Therefore we are uncertain and troubled by doubts, dragged hither and thither like ship which has lost its rudder, and we do not know how this affair is going to end. For this reason there are scarcely twenty Catholics who do not go to the Armenian (schismatic) church, and there are hundreds who go and dispute with us because we do not go. They also believe they sin by going there and they have scruples on the point, though they refrain unto death from a heretical profession of faith and from excommunication. If we were not thus divided and we all went, but without fault, to the Armenian churches, our numbers would daily increase and there would be no trouble. But now instead of that, once the first persecution ceases, another is set on foot, so that our rich, laden often with fines, are impoverished, and our poor who are in debt flee to foreign lands, and their families perish through want of the necessities of life. Ah! what misery! The schismatics themselves say to us. 'If you were to come sometimes to our church, we should never force you to say, "Anathema", nor should we have raised a persecution against you. But when you in your obstinacy do not come to our church nor mix with us, so much the more do we refuse to baptise your infants, bless the marriages of your children and bury your dead.'

Until you say, "Anathema", we shall not cease to persecute you and we shall see who will suffer by this obstinacy of yours!' That is how our adversaries menace us. One time the local Superior so stubbornly insisted on a profession of faith from someone who had a dead friend to be buried, that nothing could persuade him, neither bribes nor appealing to the Turkish tribunal to compell him by force. For the priest, presenting himself before the judge, said, 'These people never come to our church. Why compell us to bury their dead? We will not do that. Let them go themselves and cut up their dead, make bacon of them and eat it'. Behold the motive of their unwillingness to bury our dead and demand the anathemas: because we do not enter their churches — and nothing else. And we, not knowing what to do, have recourse to your clemency. So in your charity have compassion on us. We pray you to deliver us by your wisdom from this plot, for we are in

great straits. We await with confidence the answer to the letter we dispatched to the Sacred Congregation, which we sent along with your letter that you might forward it with your own hand and return the answer here. Enough. Fare well in the Lord. Amen.

In the year of the Lord, 1723.

The 23rd of April.

Of Your Most Rev. Lordship

The most humble servants,
The Catholic Armenians of Aleppo

(L. S.) Mahdesi George	(L. S.) Brother Milidòn
" Brother Peter	" Brother Menatzagan
" George, cleric.	" Deodatus, cleric.
" Brother Minas.	" Bro. Gregory.
" Mardiros, cleric.	" Bro. George.
" Bro. Gregory.	" Bro. David.
" Bro. Paschal.	" Bro. George.
" Bro. Arakiël.	" Bro. George.
" Bro. Isaac.	" Bro. Nahabied.

All these testimonies reveal the work of the missionaries in the East. Almost contemporaneously there began the mission for Western Armenians in Hungary.

We have seen the letter of the clergy and of the notabilities of Gherla, one of the Armenian cities of Transylvania. There followed on other letters to Abbot Mechitar and to the S. C. of Propaganda. Then the Abbot thought of sending someone there to confer with Bishop Hovnan, his old friend, who had come from Rome. So he sent F. Emmanuel from Constantinople. The two delegates received a festive welcome, and, when, shortly after, the bishop returned to St. Lazarus, F. Emmanuel remained behind and thus began that flourishing mission which gave so many holy ministers to the altar of God and instituted schools for education.

12. However among these spiritual occupations and consolations there was not wanting pain for the paternal heart of Abbot Mechitar. And how could it be otherwise? The malign spirit found amongst the very disciples of the Divine Saviour a Judas to betray him! Had not the great Founders of Orders -

St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius and others, heartrending troubles from some disciple who afterwards deserted the Order?

Amongst the first disciples of Mechitar was F. George of Aintab, an impetuous and talkative character, who had often been admonished by his Superior and who, if not always, at any rate sometimes had humbled himself and had promised to correct himself. His imprudent words were the cause of his being accused at Rome. Mechitar knew him and rebuked him, but always as a father, and he pitied him. He loved him for his many good qualities and particularly for his abnegation and his apostolic zeal. When he was accused at Rome, Mechitar recalled him from the East and accompanied him to Rome, for one thing it is to be guilty of imprudent speech, and another to be a schismatic and a heretic. In these circumstances the accused monk, through fear of condemnation had become quite timid like a lamb, followed out all the orders of his superior and showed himself most obsequious to him. But when the cause was won and he was justified by name, he recovered and felt emboldened. He began by demanding that his adversaries be severely punished. Since the Abbot preached pardon, charity and forgetfulness of everything (he even wrote so and wished his friends in the East to act in like manner, excusing his enemies and feeling sorry at such hubbub) F. George rebelled against the orders of his Superiour and grew furious. Happening to be still in Rome with the Abbot, he insisted with a loud and domineering voice that action should be taken at Propaganda against his accusers. These scenes were renewed at Venice but with more violence, and there he had as accomplice another Father who had been accused along with him in the East, F. Joseph of Brussa. They behaved in such an extravagant way that everyone believed them to be mentally affected. They went so far as to publish to the Armenian people the story that Mechitar's community could not go on and that it would be dissolved in a few months.

The scandal was public. Mechitar assembled his counsellors. It was decided to impose on F. George the obligation of going on a pilgrimage to St. James of Compostello in Spain. — a very frequent pilgrimage then, and one to be performed mostly on foot. They hoped that the long absence and the fatiguing journey would be at the same time a punishment and a source of spiritual edification.

He pretended to obey, pocketed the necessary money and set out; but instead of making for Spain, went off to Rome, there slandered, then retracted, said most incoherent things, procured money in the name of the Abbot from an Armenian painter named John, an acquaintance of Mechitar, and afterwards left for Leghorn. Here also he borrowed money from Don Bartholomew in the Abbot's name, and made out of his own head the story that the sentence of the 12th January, 1719 permitted Catholics to enter schismatic churches. From Leghorn he returned to St. Lazarus. Mechitar, who was of meek and gentle temperament could not permit such a scandal on the island of St. Lazarus. Nevertheless, having always a father's tenderness, he brought him to the city and lodged him in a rented room. He wrote also to Rome to the painter John, taking upon himself to pay the debts, and did the same to Don Bartholomew of Leghorn, to whom he also explained the true meaning of the Pope's sentence, which did not permit Catholics to enter schismatic churches unless forced to, and then without giving scandal or making a profession of a false faith. He then assembled his council again and submitted everything to them. The council decided (9th Dec. 1719) to expell F. George from the Community, and the Abbot communicated their decision to him in a letter which displayed all his inherent charity and goodness. F. George immediately set out for Constantinople, thence to Eudocia where he led a turbulent life, and in disconnected language told everyone that the Pope had given permission to enter schismatic churches. Everywhere in Asia Minor he was an object of aversion, so he determined to re-

turn to Constantinople. But he was drowned at sea while entering a ship during a storm. This death was revealed by God, says the famous F. Matthew, eight years before¹.

13. Though the aberrations of F. George caused immense pain and physical suffering to the Abbot, he was consoled by the fact that the monastery and the missions collaborated with happy results to promote the glory of God and the exaltation of the Catholic religion among all the Armenians, both of east and west. From all parts poured in praises of his holy and active institute which was doing such excellent work for Catholicism and proper education, and was blessed by the merciful God, by His Vicar on earth and by the dignitaries of the Church in the Orient and the Occident. But whilst he thus believed he was living in the peace of the Lord, behold like a thunderbolt from a calm serene sky, there came to him with painful surprise the following letter from Cardinal Sacripante, Prefect of the S. C. of Propaganda.

Very Rev. Father

With not a little wonder have these my Most Eminent Lords come to hear that your Paternity has written both to Constantinople and to other cities of Asia that you obtained from Our Lord (the Pope) permission for Catholic Armenians to go freely to schismatical churches and receive there the sacraments of the schismatics; and that two of your monks, one of whom is called F. Gabriel, still assert the same in Constantinople. Therefore, since this is true (as this Sacred Congregation has ascertained from sources worthy of credence) their Eminences order your Paternity to retract explicitly, and without the least delay give a positive command to the above-mentioned monks to retract in the same way; for His Holiness has never given such a permission, much less has he defined it to be lawful, but has merely suggested that theologians be consulted and learned ecclesiastics who have lived in those regions for a long time and are well versed in the rites

1. *Annals of the Congregation*, 20th year. p. 232.

and doctrines of the schismatic Armenians. At the same time he admonishes them to abstain from all acts professing a false religion, from all occasion of scandal and from all danger of perversion.

Their Eminences are confident that you will not delay to give a proof of your submission by promptly fulfilling whatever this communication imposes on you. Finally I recommend myself to your prayers.

Rom, 8th Feb. 1721.

At the pleasure of your Paternity,
Joseph Card. Sacripante, Prefect.
Dominic Passionei, Pro - Secr.

Only he who has studied deeply the soul of the Servant of God can understand the sharp pain he felt on reading this letter, he who in all his actions sought only the glory of God and full, absolute obedience to the prescriptions of the Holy See. What then had happened that the Cardinal Prefect should write this letter?

I have elsewhere referred to the illfeeling with which some received the decree, dated the 12th Jan, 1719, of Pope Clement XI with reference to the question, 'Can Armenian Catholics in Turkey enter schismatic churches?' The sentence of the Pontiff, 'Ad mentem', that is, to consult Doctors of Theology and upright men, and ecclesiastics who had had long experience in those missions, had become in the mouth of some interpreters, desirous of excessive toleration, a very convenient expression, and these, passing from the wish to the realisation, published everywhere that the Holy See had given permission to enter any church *freely*. The same thing was preached also by some ignoramuses who had not understood the whole sentence. Therefore Mechitar's missionaries, and among them the zealous apostle F. Gabriel who was then at Erzerum, turned for instruction to the Abbot, who in a lengthy reply explained the mind of the Holy See. Those persons who were intolerant of any kind of communication, at whose head was the vicar-apostolic of Constantinople, Mgr. Galani, accused Me-

chitar straight away as if he had deceived the Pope, destroyed the decree, and written to his missionaries that the *communicatio in divinis* with the schismatics was permitted. In particular two of them were accused of spreading the false news that the Holy See had given permission to go *freely* to the churches of the schismatics. And so it was that the Cardinal Prefect, on receiving such tidings from Mgr. Vicar-Apostolic of Consthantinople, wrote the letter of the 8th of February, enjoining that such false reports be withdrawn without delay.

Cardinal Sacripante, while conveying this instruction to Mechitar, sought at the same time for light on the question and wished to arrive at some decision, for he wished to give a fixed rule to all missionaries, since they were in a very embarrassing position and had no clear, decisive injunctions from headquarters. So he wrote on the first of February to two authoritative missionaries, one F. Philip of Milan¹, Guardian of the Holy Land, and the other Dr. Khatchatur.

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1. To F. James Philip of Milan, Guardian of the Holy Land, Jerusalem.

This Sacred Congregation wishes to have full information from your Paternity as to whether the Catholics of Constantinople, Asia Minor and other regions subject to Ottoman rule, who have not churches of their own, are obliged to bring their children to schismatic churches to be baptised, bury their dead there, and contract matrimony there with permission of the Armenian schismatic Patriarch; and whether in the reception or administration of the Sacraments outside schismatical churches, they are in danger of death or some other grave misfortune, or whether they can communicate *in divinis* with Armenian schismatics without acting in such a way as to profess a false religion, without giving scandal, or without fear of perversion, or whether by thus communicating it is to be feared that the schismatics be confirmed in their errors and heresies, and the Catholics be corrupted who have abjured schism, since both parties might believe that the errors and heresies of the schismatics were approved.

14. Mechitar, on receiving the letter of the Most Eminent Cardinal Prefect, though plunged in deep grief, as was his wont did not answer immediately, but gave himself up to prayer in the meanwhile, had recourse to the most holy Virgin-Mother, protectress of the Community, and then finally wrote in Armenian and had translated into Italian a submissive, clear, well reasoned answer, worthy of an eminent moralist, an acute dialectician and a humble saint. He begins by acknowledging receipt of the letter.

Most Eminent, Reverend and Worshipful Masters,

I have received the most reverend letter of Your Eminences written on the 8th inst. and in it I understand what Your Eminences order me from the reports you have received. I, who have always with all submissiveness and respect venerated the commands of Your Eminences and recognised my strict obligation of executing them, now offer myself, ready to fulfil them in everything, without the least delay, on this particular occasion.

In the first place Your Eminences command me to give a positive order to two of our monks, one of whom is called F. Gabriel, to retract what they have said, viz. that they have obtained from Our Lord (the Pope) permission for Catholic Armenians to enter freely into schismatic churches and in them receive the sacraments of the schismatics. Though I am certain that they never said such a thing, but rather the opposite, nevertheless in order to comply with the esteemed injunctions of Your Eminences, I shall write as soon as possible not only to the persons referred to, who are at present in Asia, in divers, distant cities, but also to the other monks now engaged in preaching at Constantinople and elsewhere, strictly ordering them not merely to retract such a falsehood if they ever

We shall await then the forwarding of the answer of your Paternity, to be submitted with the greatest clearness and secrecy and used at an opportune moment. To your prayers I heartily recommend myself.

Rome 1st Feb. 1721.

Card. Joseph Sacripante.

uttered it, but also, wherever they hear it pronounced or in the past have heard it pronounced by the lips of any one, to contradict it with all haste and zeal, and to show everyone that whoever repeats it is not only foolish, but a liar and a deceiver.

The other order of Your Eminences was that, since it is true that I wrote to Constantinople and some cities of Asia that I had obtained permission to, etc, as before, I must withdraw it. Again I must write to say clearly and explicitly that, I if I ever wrote such a letter as these reports say, then what it contained is false.

Now on this point, since there is no person in any city who has received any such letter from me, or to whom I could have written it, and since on the other hand I could not unjustly calumniate myself on such an important question, for candidly speaking I do not remember writing or ever dreaming of such a thing, it manifestly follows that I cannot observe your commands in the way you have indicated, but I am not sorry at being able to observe them in another way possible to me.

In conformity with this I shall most readily write to all our monks who are in those parts in this tenour: 'If any one in any city is of opinion that I thought or wrote anywhere that I had received from the Sovereign Pontiff permission, etc, as before, you are to tell him that this opinion is false, because our Father Abbot has never written nor dreamt of such a lie. Rather he is of the opposite opinion, has told us so by letter and has strictly enjoined on us the duty of suppressing it wherever we happen to hear it'. Such shall I write, and, to tell the truth, I hold it to be such an enormity to lie to Your Eminences that of my own accord I should have written in the above terms, were I to hear from anyone that in the East some persons believed me to have spread there such false and stupid statements, because it would have pained me deeply to think that people thought so of me'.

Then he inquires as to how such a report could have got abroad. He strongly denies his having published such a statement and adds,

'And if the words, by which I have asserted that nowhere did I write such a letter, are not worthy of credence, Your Eminences, if it so pleases, can write to those who lodged such information against me and demand the

letter from those to whom it is said I wrote it, and let it be sent to Your Eminences, for whatever turns up I am at your compete disposal. Certainly if the love and obedience which I profess towards the Holy See and your Eminences make light and sweet the weight of these and other afflictions and calumnies raised against me continually for many years by our persecutors, much sweeter would they make any punishment which I really deserved.

Then he relates how he received a copy of the papal decree from the hands of the Apostolic Nuncio to the Most Serene Republic, how he gave copies of it to his missionaries to bring to Constantinople and consign to Mgr. Galani, Patriarchal Vicar. In those decrees there was not to be found the word 'freely' which evidently contradicted the instructions given and....

'Mgr. Galani to whom the said decree had been presented ought to have opposed me and our monks by means of this decree, by making known to all the Catholics that such a permission is not to be found in the decree as we pretended was in it, and so he would have crippled us as much as he wished. But he acted differently, because on seeing the decree he began to say in the presence of many persons, reproaching our monks, "Your Father Abbot has deceived His Holiness and the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office by his false proposals; and so this decree has been drawn up, otherwise it was impossible for Our Lord (the Pope) to come to such a decision'. By these pretexts he strove to make believe that the decree was invalid. Meanwhile, whilst he again and again went about speaking in this fashion, the discussion gradually reached the ears of many. However it did not cause us so much pain being called inventors of falsehoods (what we published being so evident that everyone could and can see that it was not false). What brought us infinite displeasure was that his sayings served the simple people with a reason and an occasion for drawing the following consequence. "In that decree permission is given to Catholic Armenians to go freely, etc, but Mgr. Galani objects that it has been conceded on false grounds".

Since Mgr. Galani sometimes mentioned to others which of my proposals was false, his hearers immediately would say to him, "Such a proposal cannot be false. Many sim-

pletons might be scandalised through vehement wonder, but how could His Holiness be deceived?" However no such scandal followed, decause whoever once examines the nature of such a proposal knows only too well that it is true. Then our monks have not only shown and defended that His Holiness was not deceived but also that he did not grant such a permission. By this means they have arrested the progress of the false reasoning of the simple, well knowing how hurtful would be an idea so utterly false. In spite of this our enemies have represented us to Your Eminences as incendiaries, when we were merely putting out a fire lighted by other hands.....'.

He relates also the circumstance which led him to have recourse to the S. C. of the Holy Office.

'The Most Eminent Card. Tanara who was the *Ponens* in our affair, kept me back when I was about to depart from Rome to Venice, after having received from Your Eminences a favourable judgement on our case, and said to me, "You have successfully managed your own business, and do you mean to neglect what concerns the needs of your poor nation? Please do this: Go to each of the Cardinals and Consultors of the Holy Office and lay open to them the great difficulties experienced by the Armenian Catholics in this question. Write out on some sheets of paper full information on the circumstances of the proposal which we have forwarded to the Holy Office and by repeated comings and goings you will force them to come to some resolution. His Eminence, whom I could not disobey, advised me, so that I did all I could, and whatever I wrote I presented it first to the Cardinal *Ponens* and then to Mgr. Caraffa the secretary, and finally, by the command of these two, to the Congregation of the Holy Office. Meanwhile there also wrote Dr. Catchadur, missionary apostolic, giving some information on this score to Your Eminences, in which every difficulty and danger of the Catholics was cleared up. This was also sent by the secretary to the Holy Office and so the decree on this question came out. All these details are yet preserved in the Holy Office where, if it please Your Eminences, it may be seen that my proposal which was briefly mentioned in the decree and yet is the cause of my being branded as an inventor of falsehoods, is by no means false, but evidently true.

Furthermore, if what I proposed was false, let my adversaries (if they can) prove it from things past or present.

Before the oft-quoted decree came out, for the space of ten years they continually asserted in Constantinople that a new decree had been published by the Sovereign Pontiff, positively prohibiting all Armenian Catholics under pain of mortal sin from going to schismatical churches to receive the sacraments. Given that, it is certain that in the course of so many years there were thousands of Catholic Armenians to be baptised, married and buried. Now where were all these baptised, married, buried? Let our opponents point out to us first, if they can, any who had the boldness to provide themselves with these public sacraments outside the schismatical churches, and then let them baptise us as liars and say, "There! The difficulty has been obviated without danger of death and without going to schismatical churches."

It would be necessary to quote this apologetic letter in its entirety to show the conditions of fact and right prevailing amongst Armenians in Turkey,

'because in the Turkish Empire the schismatical Patriarch of the Armenians has by royal decree the right that no one baptise, marry or bury without his permission, and from these sources he draws a great part of his patriarchal revenue to pay the Ottoman Porte. So all the priests together, with permission of the Patriarch, keep all Armenians under them, and one has a hundred families, another more, another less, and each one administers the sacraments to his own subjects.

If some will say, "One can secretly baptise or be married at home," I answer that one can, but to no purpose, for the schismatic parish-priest insists that the child be brought to church eight days after birth to be publicly enrolled as a subject of the parish. The parents are afraid to say that it is already baptised, but must bring it to be re-baptised. Similarly in the case of a clandestine marriage one cannot keep a woman at home as wife. So if they do not contract matrimony in a schismatical church, they must go together to the high-priest of the Turks who joins them in matrimony with the following form, "By order of God, according to the laws of the Prophet (Mahomet) do you mutually accept one another?" If they answer "Yes", they are solemnly joined.'

He contrasts with this state of things the conditions of Persian Armenia where, as we said, the patriarchal rights granted by the government do not exist.

'In the city of Tiflis, subject to the king of Persia, the Armenian Catholics without danger of death are wont to provide themselves with the above-mentioned necessities in the churches of the Capuchin Fathers (though even here there is trouble sometimes). If this custom could be introduced among the Catholic Armenians scattered throughout the vast empire of the Turks, then indeed our proposal would be false. But, as I said, such a thing has not hitherto been managed nor has it been manageable. God grant that it be managed in the future. Even let my proposal be considered to have been false, provided I be consoled with seeing the afflicted Catholics of my country freed once for all from the tyrannical jurisdiction of their schismatic priests, and thus freed also from the necessity of frequenting the churches of the same'.

Mechitar by his foresight, worthy of a superior intellect, finds but one remedy for this painful state of things.

'In truth there remains for us but one hope, and this not without foundation, that by the gradual increase of the Catholic people, when the greater part and, above all, the principal personages, have embraced the orthodox faith, it would be easy to substitute by a royal decree in place of the schismatic Patriarch, a Catholic Patriarch over all the Armenians; and this could be very easily managed, as I said.

So much in the meantime I have written, as according to my conscience and my judgement I deemed necessary both for the fulfilment of the venerated commands of Your Eminences and for the suitable defence of my own, though useless, person. If by Your Eminences it be judged insufficient, I declare myself always most ready to obey whatever other order you may be pleased to impose upon me.

Finally resigning myself anew and submitting myself in all things to the most prudent judgment and correction of Your Eminences, I most humbly kiss your sacred purple and sign myself for ever

Venice, 22nd Feb. 1721.

Of Your Eminences

The most humble, devoted and obliged Servant

Mechitar, son of Peter,

Abbot of the Armenian monks.

This letter, containing really Catholic doctrine, full of clear and convincing logic, as was always the style of the Servant of God, gave the death-blow to the accusations against Mechitar and his missionaries on the score of orthodoxy. After the letter of the 22nd of February we find no trace of accusations or defences, nor even instructions on this head. However he, with that humility which was characteristic of him, inserted in the '*Instructions to Missionaries*' that in all doubts they were to turn to the Patriarchal Vicar of Constantinople, who was always an archbishop of the Latin rite.

15. But the Holy See had not finished with the matter. It was seeking for more light on the subject and the judgment of competent persons, and nine months from the date of Mechitar's self-defence we find a letter of the Prefect of the S. C. of Propaganda to the new Patriarchal Vicar of Constantinople, Mgr. Peter Mauri, titular Archbishop of Carthage¹, in which, the Cardinal, after complaining of the confusion engendered by the question of the frequentation or no of schismatic churches, adds, 'Since however the discussion of this important and thorny question is actually being engaged in at the Holy Office, so your report on this subject has been handed in to it, and when that Sacred Tribunal has come to some decision on the point, you will be acquainted with it without delay to aid your ruling of your missionaries'².

What was the opinion of the learned Patriarchal Vicar and what the decision of the Holy Office, we learn from the decree of the 17th July, 1723, which confirmed word for word the decree of the 12th Jan. 1719, promulgated by Pope Clement

1. On 27th Nov. 1719, Propaganda accepted the resignation of Mgr. Galani and permitted him to return home. But he remained yet a while in Constantinople. His successor took his place on the 8th of September, 1720.

2. Archives of Propaganda. Letter of the year 1721. Folio no. 690.

XI along the lines of the treatise asked for by Card. Tanara from Mechitar.

Since we are treating of a question which gave rise to painful accusations and discussions for a quarter of a century and more, it will not be out of place to refer briefly to its final settlement. The persecutions of the schismatic Patriarch ceasing by order of the Turkish government itself¹ and this peace continuing from 1724 to 1729, the Holy See thought it now an opportune moment to examine things under their new aspect. After 1725 when Catholic priests could celebrate freely, things in the East had quite changed. Many cities asked for missionaries from Mechitar, because they could officiate without let or hindrance. The priests and people of Trebizond in 1726, on sending for a pastor from Mechitar, added that there was no longer anything to fear from anyone, and that the missionary could preach freely. The Holy See, informed of all this, and seeing that there was no danger of prison or death, then published the decree of the year 1729, which forbade Catholics enter the churches of schismatics.

There followed a period of great calm, so much so that the Archbishop of Smyrna, Minas, who openly professed Catholicism without any interference from the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin or from the Patriarch of Constantinople, wrote in 1731 to the Card. Prefect of Propaganda, Card. Petra, asking permission to go to Venice to visit Abbot Mechitar and then to retire to Rome and there wear out his old age. The Cardinal in his answer, after referring to the religious tranquillity, added, however, that the Archbishop's presence at Smyrna would be of great utility, because the past might return. He communicated this idea also to Mechitar by a letter dated the 28th of March, 1733².

1. Tchamatchan, *Storia degli Armeni*. Ed. Venice 1785. Vol. III. p. 822.

2. Archives of Propaganda. Letters of the S. C. of 1733, Vol. 137, folio no. 61.

Ten years later on the institution by Pope Benedict XIV of the Armenian Catholic patriarchate of Cilicia, the Armenian Catholics received a religious hierarchy, but not recognised by the Turkish government as having civil-religious jurisdiction. This lasted until 1830, when, after tremendous persecutions and exiles of Catholics on the part of the schismatics, the Turkish government, exhorted by the French ambassador, General Guilleminot, constituted a civil Armenian Catholic patriarch.

From that day the new Community began to breathe freely and became greatly respected in the East and the West, it having many among its clergy and laity who had received their education in Italy or in France.

CHAPTER XVI.

Abbot Mechitar's disciples.

1. The companions of Abbot Mechitar. — 2. Necessity of selecting promising youths. — 3. They were to be only of Armenian nationality. — 4. The journey of the recruits to Venice from the East. — 5. The novitiate and the professed-housed at St. Lazarus. — 6. Mechitar watches over their education. — 7. Spiritual exercises. — 8. Absolute obedience. — The students' spontaneity. — 9. The Mechitarian generation in the Abbot's time. — 10. The Patriarch, Peter I, wishes to obey Mechitar and his religious Community. — 11. The Apostolic-Delegate a welcome guest.

1. Mechitar, in the formation of his Community, had, for the most part, chosen men of a certain age and priests desirous of banding themselves together, with aspirations towards the contemplative life, and inflamed with the desire of preaching the truth among their countrymen. But they all were wanting in knowledge and had to be prepared by the studies necessary for so high and important a calling.

Ribadeneira writes, in his 'Life of St. Ignatius, that 'not only young men of genius and promise were inclined to enter his Society but also erudite and grave men, who offered foundations of colleges'. Mechitar, who like St. Ignatius had introduced a fourth vow of mission-work into his Congre-

gation, burned with the same desire of uniting companions who were learned and eager, but where could he find them in Armenia at such a period of universal ignorance? He had to begin from the foundations with new and juvenile elements and gradually progress in the spiritual life, in studies, in philosophy, theology and literature.

2. Hence arose an extensive correspondence with the missionaries he sent out from Modon or Venice to countries inhabited by Armenians, particularly in Asia Minor, bidding them make a rigorous selection among the young men who presented themselves or were presented by their parents as candidates for entrance. First of all they were to be of pious families, and were to be of a meek and willing disposition, capable of the work before them and inclined to study. He recommended that as far as possible they should be of a healthy constitution and not weak or delicate. In his letters he insisted that the missionaries before shipping these boys to Venice, should try them and inquire if they had a vocation to the monastic life and to study, and should lay bare to them the difficult rather than the pleasant side of the life they thought of embracing. With great difficulty would he accept the only sons of a family, unless there were distinctive signs of a true vocation. The age of these youths was not to be below 12 or above 16 years. At that tender age they are more inclined to instruction and are more easily drawn to love the community into which they enter so animated and with all the dash of young hearts. He ordered his missionaries not to take deformed boys, or such as had an eccentric disposition, were defective, demented or epileptic, because all this would prevent them presenting themselves becomingly to preach the word of God, and because such defects often have a sinister effect on the mind. He counselled them to prefer the poor to the rich, unless the rich showed an exceptional ardour of stripping themselves of this world's comforts, and had the humility and the vocation required for the monastic life.

3. He had prescribed that all the members be Armenians since they were to be apostles among the Armenian people. There were sons of many Venetian families, even noble ones, who wished to enter Mechitar's Community, but, with great prudence, he always refused to accept them, fearing lest the Armenian element might diminish or disappear and so his institution might lose its determined end and be of no use to his beloved country. Then, since his whole aim was to spread the truth of the Catholic faith in Armenia, how could he have instructed foreigners in the language and customs of his country? He therefore remained firm in his principle, which is still followed out, of never accepting those who were not of Armenian nationality.

4. All these youths were chosen from the East, or in countries in the West inhabited by Armenians, as, for instance, Transylvania (beyond Hungary proper). In those days travelling was a very tedious affair. The most successful journeys were done in the frigates of the Most Serene Republic or by diligences on *terra firma*, when they come from the East into Venetian territory. Even ambassadors or sea-captains of the 'Dominating' offered to take these recruits with them and, viceversa, to convey them back from Venice to the East.

The young aspirants were always accompanied on these voyages by one of the missionaries or by some western priest. Mechitar took good care that even these journeys should not be passed idly. He recommended them to have with them some spiritual book, and even treatises on grammar. He was thus certain of their spiritual and intellectual profit.

When they arrived at Venice from different and distant lands, they come to St. Lazarus and entered the apartments of the aspirants. This portion of the monastery was at first very confined, but in the year 1725 the Abbot chose the most beautiful and the healthiest position in the island, because he had a special care for the health of all, particularly of the young, and there built the Novitiate.

There were gathered together the boys under the vigilance of their father-master, who was chosen from amongst the more advanced members, was proficient in the spiritual life and in study, and had had experience of the missions. On entering that



Mechitar offers his disciples to the Blessed Virgin.
(From an old wood-cut)

Novitiate, their first study and occupation was their catechism, their preparation for the spiritual life, the holy practice of weekly confession and communion, the manifestation of conscience to their spiritual director and the practice of monastic discipline

in every sense of the term. He explained to them in person how every act, exteriorly good, is worth nothing if it does not derive its true beauty from the soul and the heart which God sees, scrutinises and judges, and that they must therefore be interiorly good, for all hypocrisy is hurtful, damnable, and sinful.

In this way did he exercise the newly-arrived, the aspirants in the Novitiate. When their number increased, the Servant of God built, in 1732, another structure for those had taken their monastic vows. This was called the Professed House and was directed by another father-master suited for guiding them in their spiritual life and in their philosophical and theological studies. Besides these two airy and well-lighted constructions for preserving the young folk's health, Mechitar brought the scholars and the young priests every year to the mainland for a holiday, to breathe for three or four weeks the fresh air of the fields. His favourite spot was Noventa Padovana, a little village on the banks of the Piovego canal, with a bright smiling landscape and pure balmy air¹.

5. The two constructions mentioned above had no intercommunication and were separated from the priests' apartments, who were not allowed to enter, unless commissioned by the Abbot to impart religious instruction. Mechitar, who in the foundation of the Congregation had to instruct everyone, watch over everything and see for himself if all were progressing towards the great end, — he alone, besides the masters, had the keys of the Novitiate and the Professed-house. He often went in to keep a vigilant eye over the education of the scholars, their behaviour towards one another and towards their superiors or professors. Not a few times he would take part in their recreation because in this way one comes to know men's characters better, above

1. The Community had no country-house of their own, but they afterwards bought one at Fiesso d' Artico, during the reign of Mechitar's successor.

all, if they are young people. Among his little children he was familiar and grave, severe and kind, loved and admired. When he came among them during their free hours, he insisted on their continuing their innocent, genial and instructive games, and, according to tradition, had translated for this purpose the book of *Spiritual Games* which he had seen in a Franciscan monastery and which on his death was corrected and printed. By means of these games the whole catechism was learnt in a very pleasant way.

6. He directed his whole attention against useless talk on the part of the novices, the professed or the priests. He sought in all things to remove from his disciples all inclination to vain and earthly things, that they might long ever more for the contemplative life and for the studies necessary for their calling, wherewith they might be of some use one day to their brethren and countrymen. He taught them to unite themselves inseparably with their Divine Saviour with all the joy of their soul, in dying to the world and living in Christ, for this is true life, and to this perfection one attains by meditating on the eternal verities personified in Jesus.

F. Ribadeneira in his 'Life of St. Ignatius' attests that 'the institution of the Society (of Jesus) is owing to the use of the 'Exercises' ... Almost all the fathers who were Ignatius' first companions, and those who, following their example, entered the the Society later..... who have been persons distinguished by their genius, their learning or their aristocratic blood, or other natural gifts, were for the most part guided and moved to the divine hand by these holy meditations'.

Mechitar was of a like conviction, and in practice followed out a similar line of conduct, recommending always to his companions prayer and meditation. In the course of the year he made them

go through the spiritual exercises several times, and joined with them in these holy practices, developing often the eternal truths, drawing them and raising them up to the perfection of monastic life, to humility and obedience.

7. He insisted a great deal on obedience, and wished it to be absolute and blind, for in this blind obedience consists that perfect subjection of him whose eyes are illumined by the humility and will of our Blessed Lord. Such obedience is, as St. Ignatius says¹, 'the guide and the master of all religious virtues, the enemy of one's own will, the mother of unity and brotherly peace, a certain and perpetual repast for those souls that confide in God'. When a religious strips himself of his own will and puts on that of his superiors, then indeed is he dead to the world to live in God without trouble, and with an enviable calmness and tranquillity.

Mechitar, to exercise his disciples in this degree of obedience, sometimes ordered on purpose things which apparently were an excess of zeal, too cruel a blow to their self-love, or a mortifying trial. Yet the Servant of God, sacrificing his own feelings, his humility and his charity, made such experiments to ascertain the blind obedience and humility of his future sons.

On this heading it is related by Fr. Matthew and Archbishop Akonz, Mechitar's second successor, that the students in philosophy had, with his permission, constructed the whole solar system in box-wood, with a contrivance executed with wonderful intelligence and beauty. There was the equator, the meridian, the twelve signs of the Zodiac, the Arctic and Antarctic circles, the constellations, the solstices and other accessories, and in the centre the earth. This was all set in motion round the sun by an ingenious mechanism. Abbot Mechitar was very pleased with it, praised the progress they had made

1. Op. cit. Bk. IV, ch. IV.

and encouraged their skill. But afterwards he summoned the novice master to his cell, and, whilst expressing his satisfaction at this piece of machinery, added that he would be more pleased if, mortifying their pleasure, they were to consign the construction to the flames. How great was his joy on hearing, a few minutes later, that scarcely had the young students heard of their Abbot's wish, than most joyfully they obeyed it. Then the Servant of God went back to them and told them the joy of his heart at such abnegation, practised so spontaneously, without wavering or seeking to be freed from it. He praised their obedience, blessed them and returned to his cell very happy.

8. The young novices and professed, thus educated in piety, obedience and humility, when they reached the honour of being ministers in the Holy Sacrifice, were not elated with this great dignity but rather more humble and full of fear. Archbishop Akonz, who had lived with the disciples of the Servant of God, describes them in these terms: 'They were pious, obedient and humble of heart. They were poor and loved poverty. They were charitable, compassionate and helped one another. They were sincere, meek and prudent in word and deed. Far removed from the glory of this world, they were never to be seen in the public squares, gazing at the games which are so common in Venice. No one ever saw them in the street unless on necessary business, and never were they seen stop in the public road or chat with anyone'.

9. This pious, modest and retired life of theirs was observed and admired by all the citizens of Venice, whence the clergy and people held them in unbounded and disinterested admiration, and believed the *Armenian Fathers* a comfort to and a boast of the city of Venice, and as something inseparable from it — and that to this day.

1. '*Life of Abbot Mechitar*', p. 232.

In the year 1742, there was nominated patriarchal Vicar (or Delegate Apostolic) at Constantinople, Mgr Jerome, who came to Venice, before setting sail in a Venetian ship. Since he had to wait some time, he asked the Patriarch of Venice to point out to him a monastery where he could spend quietly the intervening days. The patriarch spoke of the esteem and veneration which the *Armenian Fathers* of St. Lazarus enjoyed by reason of their exemplary monastic life. The future delegate went to them and was kindly received by Abbot Mechitar. 'He remained on the island a month with a canon and two servants. He remarked the good order and heavenly peace which reigned in the monastery, the modest and attentive deportment of the monks in church and refectory, their low voice when speaking in recreation time after dinner, and, in general, the entire monastic silence, which was such that, though many monks lived there, it seemed there was no one. On ascertaining this and the proper maintenance of discipline, he admired it all, his heart rejoiced, and he spoke of it to others in terms of great praise. His companion, the canon, did the same. He became so attached to the Congregation that he left the monastery in tears. At the separation, when the monks were blessing his hand, he embraced them all affectionately and effusively, and was permitted by the Abbot to bring with him to the missions, the vardapiet, F. Michael, a native of Sebaste'¹.

10. The fame of the pious, rigid and admirable education imparted by Mechitar soon spread to the East, and not only youths and priests asked to live under his obedience, but also prelates and bishops. Archbishop Abraham of Aleppo, who was an untiring preacher of Catholic truth and a confessor of the faith in Constantinople, and was nominated by Pope Benedict XIV, first Patriarch of Cilicia for Ar-

1. Akonz, op. cit., p. 234.

menian Catholics, with name of Peter the first, wrote an obsequious letter to Mechitar, saying that he 'wished to live and die under his obedience in the religious community' which the Abbot had founded under the protection of St. Anthony the Abbot. The same wish was repeated by his successor in the see of Aleppo, Mgr. James, who succeeded him in the patriarchal dignity as well. This letter is under-signed by his twenty - one monks, several of whom were doctors of theology. Both of these famous and holy prelates were enthusiastic with the learning and holy life of Mechitar's disciples, missionaries in Aleppo and in different parts of Asia Minor. The former's letter — a very lengthy one — is very interesting as dealing with the religious persecutions we have heard so much about, the western religious orders in Armenia, and the spirit of sublime humility in that saintly patriarch and confessor of the faith. After relating his own experiences, he praises Mechitar and his missionaries for the wonderful good they are working in the East, and asks him to send some of them to him with their rule, for he and many others wish to follow it and put themselves under obedience to Mechitar.

In his answer to the venerable patriarch, Mechitar expounds the reasons why he believes it God's will that both of them work in the Lord's vineyard, united together in mind and heart, but in separate callings. And so it was done.

CHAPTER XII.

Abbot Mechitar's missionaries.

1. Mechitar's missionary spirit. — 2. The spiritual needs of his country. — 3. The send-off of the first missionaries. — Enthusiastic eulogies of the Ordinaries and the clergy. — 4. Letters of entreaty from various dioceses for missionaries. — 5. The Armenians of Transylvania resort to him. — 6. The Sacred Congregation of Propaganda asks him to send missionaries to Belgrade. — F. Elias in Belgrade. — 7. The unsuccessful plots of his adversaries. — 8. The ceremonial departure of the missionaries. — 9. Incessant correspondence of the Abbot with them. — 10. The satisfaction and the blessing of Pope Benedict XIV and other Pontiffs. — 11. Pope Pius X and the recent missions of Mechitar's sons.

1. One must admire those Institutions whose end is to serve the Lord in the contemplative life. Such orders have been numerous in East and West, beginning from St. Paul the Hermit, St. Anthony the Abbot, and St. Macarius, down to St. Romuald and St. Bruno and a long series of cenobites who spent their lives in distant monasteries or hermitages, on mountain-tops, in unhealthy and uninhabitable marshes and in spots where man can scarcely put foot or live. Before such a height of contemplative thought, before such sacrifice of every human comfort for God Alone, man's mind is humiliated and confused, and then rises to the most sublime contemplation. This feeling is only understood by one who has visited such hermitages. Mechitar had been to many

of these deserts in the East, had lived at Sevan and had sojourned at Khor Virab. His aspirations from morning to night had been to pray, and to pray in a quiet corner of a desert-sanctuary, far from the noisy throng, and speak all alone to the merciful Jesus and the Mother of God. In such a solitude he should find all his comfort and all the peace of his soul. But then he asked himself if such were the will of God in his regard. How could he leave round about him so many poor souls abandoned in the way of perdition and ignorance? When for the first time he came across in Erzerum a father of the Society of Jesus, and learned from him what good was being done on the missions, and when, later on, he learned the life of the Patriarch St. Benedict, of St. Dominic, the father of preachers, of the Seraphic St. Francis and of the great St. Ignatius, he thought within himself, 'Why not follow in the footsteps of these great leaders, confiding in the Lord Who from nothingness, from ignorance, from fishermen, created by His grace apostles for his glory'. Then he summoned up courage, and trusting in God's help, remained firm in his resolve. Hence the refusal of Khatchatur and Bishop Melchisedech did not disarm him, but he went on undaunted, relying on the Blessed Virgin's word at Sevan. He prayed to the Lord to raise by his grace pastors and labourers to work in His vineyard, but above all, among the Armenian people. He was inspired by God to found a Community which would serve the Lord and be of some help to His own country, and this he explicitly affirms to be his end when, at the end of his edition of the Bible, he declares, 'As long as I can, as long as I live, I shall do all in my power for the spiritual good of my country'.

2. In his early youth, during his many pilgrimages, he learned well what were his country's deep wounds, the consequence, particularly, of a long Arabian and Turkish domination, those fierce enemies of the faith and morals preached by our Saviour, Jesus Christ. His heart was broken when he saw the miserable state of his countrymen, the holy priest-

hood fallen so low, learning forgotten, error creeping in, the good crushed and persecuted, schism haughty, rampant and imperious in the Turkish capital and provinces, backed up, as it was, by the civil authorities. In many places the churches were closed, the Sacraments, those grand Christian consolations, abandoned, and the most abject superstition introduced instead. Moreover those whose duty it was to contend against such impiety, dared to ordain unworthy pastors with open simony. For many a year Mechitar had fought single-handed against such errors and such decadence in the true Christian spirit. But he alone and his life alone were not adequate to cope with the difficulties of the conversion of his country and the encouragement of the good. He required — and very soon too — zealous companions and a future generation of cooperators. His holy work aroused in various hearts the longing to leave home and ease to follow the Servant of God everywhere, to serve God and preach to their country. Among his first disciples were to be found priests and vardapiets, but their knowledge was mediocre, and so he himself instructed them how to teach catechism, and preach to the people, what kind of life they had to lead on the missions and how they were to convert by the example of Christian virtue rather than by words. After preparing them well and warning them always to present themselves first to the ecclesiastical authorities, if these were Catholic, trusting in the Holy Ghost, he sent off his apostles to the various cities of the near East.

3. Immediately letters of enthusiastic praise came pouring in from all sides, and the Armenian Catholics everywhere sent for missionaries to Modon, and afterwards to Venice. These letters date from the year 1706 and continue after Mechitar's death until the time of his successor. The first are those of his Beatitude, Joseph II, Patriarch of the Chaldees, of Mgr. Dominic Mary, Bishop of Babylonia, of Bishop Martyr of Mardin, and Archbishop Peter Baptist Mauri, Vicar-Apostolic at Constantinople (1727) who gives to one of the missionaries, F. Peter of

Nuri, in his gratitude for this father's zealous labours, full power to preach everywhere within his jurisdiction.

The following letter attests the esteem in which this Archbishop held Father Peter of Nuri.

We, Brother Peter Baptist Mauri, by the grace of God and of the Holy See, Archbishop of Carthage and Vicar Apostolic in the Patriarchate of Consthantinople.

To our most beloved in Christ, Don Peter of Nuri, Armenian Catholic Vartabied, and monk of the Congregation of the Most Reverend Abbot Mechitar of Venice, health and blessing in the Lord.

Knowing by experience your sound Christian doctrine, your good religious manners, your great zeal for souls, and perceiving also what need there is of good ministers of the Gospel in the missions situated in our extensive spiritual jurisdiction, particularly among Armenian Catholics, we are obliged by duty and by our pastoral care to provide zealous missionaries who shall visit them and preach to them the word of God, administer the sacraments to them, confirm them in the holy faith and endeavour to bring back the schismatics to the bosom of our holy mother the Church. We therefore appoint you and send you to all the missions in our jurisdiction where Armenians dwell, that you may preach to them the word of God, administer the holy sacraments and perform all the offices of a good, apostolic missionary, and for this end we grant you all the faculties which are wont to be given to missionaries, that you may with all the more fruit exercise your sacred ministry. We warn you, however, to present yourself to the local ecclesiastical authorities, if they are Catholic.

Meanwhile we recommend you warmly to all our faithful, beseeching them to receive you as a faithful servant and minister of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to listen to your words of salvation, obey you, help you, supply you with the necessities of life and the means of making those journeys required in your care of souls. The good God be always with you. You pray will for us.

Given at our customary residence,
in Pera of Constantinople.

18th March, 1727.

Bro. Peter Baptist Mauri
Archbishop Vicar, as above.

The bishop of Smyrna, Mgr. Minas, was happy to shelter Abbot Mechitar's missionaries. The Superior of the Jesuits at Smyrna, Adrian Verzeau, wrote (1716) to the Abbot saying that one of the fathers, taken slave after the siege of Modon and ransomed at Constantinople, 'preached two grand sermons in our church, for which he received great applause and by which he produced much good fruit in souls'. The same person Adrian Verzeau writes to Mechitar the following year, 1717, 'You shall always find me ready to help your missioners, for with great zeal and edification they have sown the precious seed of the word of God'.

4. Numerous, too, are the letters from Armenian priests and nobility and people, asking for missioners. Again and again we have had occasion to read them in these pages. The people of Eudocia, a large and important city, praise the good works of the Mechitarists who pass through their city and call them the 'light of the world' (1710), and ask that they may never be absent from the city 'for as long as F. George, F. Elias, F. John or F. Emmanuel was with us, enmities diminished and charity increased, and certainly, if they had stayed amongst us, they would have renovated our city, and would have joined us all with the Catholic Church'.

Every time a missionary left Trebizond, the priests, the authorities and people wrote to Mechitar to send them another preacher and confessor. He never left his missionaries for a long time in one place, but made them pass from one city to another, for the suppliants were many, but missionaries few. Then he considered this frequent change of great help to the missionary spirit, because in this way his disciples did not become attached to any particular spot, and were indifferent on leaving it. The Catholics of Angora, who were more than five hundred strong, write several letters to Abbot Mechitar 'warmly beseeching him to send one of his missionaries. For five years we have had no Catholic priest with us. We have heard that we must now attend Armenian (schismatical) Churches. Here in this city there is no

Catholic church. Then who is to bless our marriages or baptize? And how shall we hear Mass on Sundays'? The Catholics of Brussa write to Mechitar (20th Sept. 1717): 'We have no consolation, no peace at heart; we never hear Mass, we never hear a sermon, and what is terrible, for years we have not been to confession. Many of us wander about from city to city in search of a (Catholic) confessor, and many die laden with sin and tortured by remorse of conscience. Every five or six years a Catholic priest passes our way and confesses us..... Then pestilence is never wanting here, so you can imagine what a disconsolate life we lead. Our enemies (the schismatics) attack us, torment us and compell us with threats to go to their churches, otherwise they will hand us over to the judge..... We therefore pray you, with tears in our eyes to send us preachers and confessors'. A pile of letters, written in the same strain, hail from Erzerum, Aleppo, Sebaste, Pirknig, and Koprù.

There is another series of letters which defend the missionaries from the many calumnies launched against them by some of their enemies, who indeed appeared zealous in speech, without being so in the practice of their sacred ministry. These went about, saying that the missionaries from Modon were not sufficiently educated, that they erred in the question of indulgences, and spread many other false accusations. Then Mechitar would write to his disciple, learn the nature of the accusation and ask for proof of its falsity. However, one must note how these charges, these calumnies never spread among the Armenians in Europe, among whom these same missionaries preached.

5. The Armenians of Transylvania had scarcely heard of the foundation of the Mechitarist Congregation, than they besieged the founder with demands for preachers and instructors, adding gently 'for we too are Armenians'. The governor of Gherla and of Ebesfalo, with the councillors and parish-priests, never wearied of writing letters. Card. Petra, Prefect of Propaganda, almost took up the rôle of interces-

sor for the people of Ebesfalo with Abbot Mechitar 'to send them one of his missionaries, for they had several times experienced the good thus accruing to their souls'. These missions in Transylvania flourished and produced much fruit until our own day. Another mission at Neusatz (Hungary) lasted until recent years, and if these ceased, it was by reason of the nationalistic spirit in Hungary, which abolished the teaching of Armenian in the secondary schools. Of course, with the loss of its language, the Armenians practically lost their nationality.

6. This same Cardinal wished the Abbot to send a father to Belgrade, and in one of his letters (1732), he bestows great praise on F. Elias who was parish-priest there; and when this father was recalled to Venice, he wanted him to be replaced by another, for he took a special interest in the mission at Belgrade.

The following interesting letters reflect a luminous ray of light on Catholicism in the Balkans.

Most Rev. Father,

This Sacred Congregation received with great pleasure the account sent by Your Paternity last 4th October, relating not only to Father Elias's taking possession of the office confided to him of missionary apostolic of the Armenians inhabiting Belgrade, but also of the zeal with which he has commenced to exercise the functions proper to his ministry, with the approbation of the ordinary and to the satisfaction of his fellow-countrymen. These Most Eminent Lords will rejoice ever more at the happy selection of him for this purpose, if he continue his good work with the same fervour and care as he commenced. Of this they have no doubt, being confident that you will not fail to spur him on to perseverance by your paternal and salutary exhortations. Meanwhile I recommend myself with all my heart to the prayers of your paternity.

Rome, 15th Nov. 1732.

At the pleasure of Your Paternity.

V. Card. Petra, Prefect

N. Forteguier, Secr.¹

1. Archives of Propaganda. 1732. Vol 135. Folio. 2900.

Reverend Father

With particular displeasure have these my Most Eminent Lords come to hear, by the letter of Your Paternity dated 27th April, of the habitual indisposition into which is fallen Father James of Busa, Armenian missionary in Belgrade, while with full approbation of their Eminences he was exercising his apostolic ministry to the great profit and pleasure of that people. Since it is to be supposed in the meantime that the same good religious cannot recover his former good health and strength, Your Paternity is given the power of choosing from amongst your monks another subject for that mission, whom you believe most fit, and let him set off immediately to Belgrade, that the spiritual assistance to the afore-mentioned mission be no longer delayed. It will be sufficient for you to indicate to us the name of the religious chosen, in order to dispatch to him the customary decree of this Sacred Congregation.

Finally I recommend myself to your prayers with all my heart.

Rome, 13th May, 1737.

At the pleasure of Your Paternity,

V. Card. Petra, Prefect.

Philip Monti Secr.¹

Reverend Father,

With as much sorrow as this Sacred Congregation heard of the sad news of the death of Father James of Busa late missionary in Belgrade, with so much joy did it receive notice of the arrival in that city of Father Michael of Varthieres, and of his taking possession from the Bishop there of the apostolic ministry on behalf of the Armenian Catholics. Much more will these my Most Reverend Lords deign to receive later the news, which they hope for, that the said Father Michael has undertaken the work not only with a zeal and prudence equal to those of his predecessor, but also with the satisfaction and contentment of his national community. Then, as regards Father James of Erzerum, since his departure from Constantinople has anticipated the order to prolong his stay there until he should receive further instructions, nothing else remains

1. Archives of Prop. 1737, Vol. 146, Fol. 153.

to be done but to await his happy return to this monastery.
To your prayers I heartily commend myself.

Rome, 21st Dec. 1737.

At your pleasure.
V. Card. Petra, Prefect.
Philip Monti, Secr. ¹

Reverend Father,

It having been approved by this Sacred Congregation, that Father James of Erzerum be sent back as missionary of his countrymen to Petervaradin, notwithstanding his ignorance of the Latin and German languages, we hereby forward you the customary decree of the same Sacred Congregation. Nothing more then remains to be done on this score than to see that the departure of this religious follow with the greatest haste, that he may set this mission aright. I commend myself to his prayers.

Rome, 22nd April, 1747

At the pleasure of Your Paternity,
P. Valenti, Prefect.
Nicolas Lercari, Secr. ²

To clear up this last letter, I must note how the missionaries of Abbot Mechitar assisted too the Catholics of the Latin rite in some missions, through their knowledge of Italian and Turkish. This state of things lasted until recent years.

Turning over the leaves of these innumerable letters, one comes to see the re-awakening of the Armenian people to the truth of the faith, a truth which was shown to them by their traditions, their history and their national Fathers.

7. We saw in chap. XIV, how such success, praise and enthusiasm aroused the jealousy and persecution of the Catholic clergy themselves, particularly of some former students of the Propaganda College, Rome, and so Mechitar's missionaries were

1. Archives of Prop. 1737, Vol. 146, Fol. 153.

2. " " " " 1747, " 168, " 89.

accused at Rome, and he himself was ordered to recall two of his disciples, who had been accused by the Vicar-Apostolic. We saw, too, how he immediately summoned them from the Levant, and went in person to Rome, where he was kindly received by Pope Clement XI and all the Cardinals. He presented his Defence of his missionaries to Propaganda and received a sentence of complete justification, and was authorized to send missionaries to the East.

Mechitar, on his return to Venice with so many blessings and so much encouragement from the Sovereign Pontiff and many of the Cardinals, set himself to work to perfect still more the apostolic work he had set on foot for his country's sake. But the hostilities did not cease. However, they were often counterbalanced by letters of encouragement from the ecclesiastical authorities in the East, who asserted the falsity of the charges and the injustice of the persecutions.

I must transcribe one of these letters, written to Abbot Mechitar in the year 1730 by the patriarchal Vicar of Constantinople, Mgr. Anthony Balsarini.

Most Rev. Father and my Most Worshipful Master,

Your Paternity anticipates me with your polite words of congratulation on my elevation to the patriarchal vicariate of Constantinople. To this I should have replied, but too serious occupations distracted me from my duty. So I ask you to forgive me. As I am returning due thanks for the congratulations which Your Most Reverend Paternity sends me, I hope to be able in due time to pass through this Dominion, satisfy my duties and arrange in what way I ought best render services to your Fathers, who are operating in this mission with great fruit, and free them, as far as I can, from the troubles they are unjustly suffering, and I declare myself,

Rome, 26th Aug. 1760.

Of Your Most Rev. Paternity,
the most devoted and most obliged servant.

Anthony Balsarini.

Correspondence of this kind came from Mgr. Jerome, one of his successors (1741, - 43, - 54), Mgr. Gabriel Hermann, Archbishop of the Metropolitan See of bolocza (1747), Mgr. Pauli, Archbishop of Larissa (1750), his Beatitude Peter II, Patriarch of Cilicia, and from many others right down to the present time. Their letters are preserved in the Archives of St. Lazarus and Propaganda. From amongst them I must choose one of Mgr. Coressi, Vicar-Apostolic at Constantinople in 1816, who was reproved by Card. Litta, Prefect of Propaganda, for being a partisan of the Mechitarists. In his answer, after deploring 'the unfortunate controversies of the students (of Propaganda) with the Mechitarists', he adds, 'However, I hope that these venerable religious are sound and pure in their faith as they are irreprehensible in their conduct. All these differences between them and the secular priests arise from the fact that the former wish to be Catholics certainly, but Armenians too, whilst the latter want to be Catholics and Latins or quasi - Latins..... That this is the case is attested not only by me, but by others who have no interest in the matter. The truth is that the intentions and motives of the Mechitarists facilitate greatly the conversion of Armenian schismatics and heretics, whilst the motives of the others arouse the interest of us — the Latin bishop and clergy. But it seems just to us to prefer the unalloyed good, which is the conversion of souls, to the impure good, which is our own interest and utility'¹.

8. Those fathers who were chosen by the council for the missions, if it were their first time, presented themselves to the Nuncio at Venice, and, as Mechitar had asked from the Holy See, they were examined in all points necessary for a missionary. When they had received the required permission, the Abbot commenced a series of instructions and spiritual exercises for them, which last several

1. This letter is printed in full in the '*Documents*'.

weeks. He even wrote a little book for the purpose, entitled 'Instructions for Missionaries', in which he recommended above everything else, obedience to the Catholic authorities. He delineated the kind of life they were to lead, pious, charitable and pure, full of sacrifice and abnegation without any recompense. Then he sent off commendatory letters to the ecclesiastical authorities or to some friend in the place to which they were going. When they were ready, the church-bell brought all the Community to the house of God, where prayers were recited and finally the Psalm, 'Direct my steps according to Thy word' was chanted. Then Mechitar, after explaining in the presence of all the grandeur of their mission, and recommending them to the Blessed Virgin Mary with a touching prayer, blessed his departing sons, who in turn embraced all their brethren and recommended themselves to their prayers. Then they marched in procession to the monastery-gate with a little bag in their hand, which contained what was of absolute necessity for the mission. The monastery boat brought them to Malamocco, from where the ship usually set sail, and waited for a favourable wind, which sometimes delayed them several weeks. Their provisions for these long voyages always consisted of sea-biscuits and cheese.

9. But with the departure of his missionaries the Abbot's unwearying cares were not at an end, yea rather, his real solicitude began only then. He wanted to have continual information of the progress of the mission. He would answer immediately, would give the necessary instructions and encourage them like a general sending his soldiers to battle. He reminded them that 'the whole world is full of discomforts and crosses, which are gold-mines, whence the humble, God-fearing soul gathers merit by patience and good works and wherewith he purchases God's paradise'. He often felt the necessity of inculcating patience and abnegation. 'Try your level best, and you will overcome your enemies with your patience and goodness'. 'Believe me that then

are you a real disciple of Christ, when you are maltreated and molested (for His name), and not when you are respected'. 'The day you suffer no cross is a day lost'.

He counselled them in a particular way to insinuate into all the love of God and of the true faith; to exhort to charity, to help the poor, forgive wrongs received and be humble and meek. Mechitar, though mild of character, became severe and inexorable before the avarice of preachers. He absolutely forbade any recompense or present. 'Know this', he wrote to F. James, 'that if any one offers a rather rich cope, do not take it'. To F. Elias he wrote, 'I have written to tell you that you must not receive any souvenir for the monastery, nor silver plate; and even if someone offers alms to the Congregation, you must not accept them... .. Just as the monk goes out of his convent poor, so he should return poor'. To F. Peter he said, 'As regards the alms and souvenirs destined for our monastery, I already told you to be very careful..... If someone even spontaneously wishes to give something to the Community, do your best to stop him and make him change his mind, by saying, "We have no need of it; it is better that you give such a sum to the poor"'.

Missionaries fed on such evangelical food were bound to be admired and sought after. If these bold soldiers of Christ received any coveted reward, it was that of Pope Benedict XIV, who, in a letter to the Abbot declared that he was most thankful to him and 'to all his monks for the missions which you are carrying on with so much fruit, and, embracing you all with paternal affection, I give you and your good monks the Apostolic Blessing'.

This loving benediction was renewed by all succeeding Sovereign Pontiffs. Pope Pius VII even honoured the community with a royal visit three days after his elevation to the Chair of St. Peter, accompanied by his Eminence, Card. Stephen Borgia, Protector of the Mechitarian Congregation, and a marble slab on the entrance to the church at St. Laza-

rus notifies this honourable event to posterity. Great interest and care was shown also by the Popes who followed. Gregory XVI sent, one day, as a surprise, a grand representation of himself, seated high on a chair and blessing the community, with whom he was very familiar before being raised to the papal throne. The work was done in marble by Fabbris. We often experienced, too, the blessing of Pius IX and the affectionate care and words of fatherly kindness and esteem from Leo XIII. During his pontificate the Congregation founded several missions¹. Pope Pius X in the presence of the Armenian Catholic Hierarchy, with the Patriarch Paul Peter XII, surrounded by archbishops, bishops, priests and people, who had hastened to this solemn audience to congratulate the Holy Father on the occasion of his sacerdotal jubilee, blessed them all and then added these words, 'I bless with all my heart the Mechitarist Fathers, whom I have long known intimately, and who have done such good work on the missions,

11. At that solemn audience, Pius X saw in spirit Mechitar and the whole band of saintly and indefatigable preachers of the true faith and the words of the Gospel, who gave new birth to the Armenian Catholic Community, which, though still small, is destined to be the leaven of the nation. At that moment he surely remembered the zealous, poor, humble, learned and eloquent Bishop of Musci, (Arme-

1. On the occasion of his episcopal jubilee, in March 1903, four months before his death, the Mechitarian Congregation of Venice, wishing to unite to this pontifical jubilee the millenarium of its precious relic, '*The Bible of the Armenian Queen Melke*', printed a fac-simile of all the decorations of this manuscript and dedicated it to his Holiness, Pope Leo XIII. As Vicar-General, I had the honour of being the bearer of this gift, the Abbot-General then being ill. The great Pontiff was very pleased to accept this present from my Congregation, especially as it

nia) with his unwearying activity and abnegation, building churches and schools, a pastor living amid



Gregory XVI.

Gift to the Mechitarist Congregation.

the terrible massacres in Armenia. The Holy Father surely saw with his mind's eye, F. Serapion, still a

was a question of a millenary *Bible*, for, but a short time before, there had been instituted a Commission for the furtherance of biblical studies; and, a few days later, when I took leave of his Holiness, since I had to return to Venice, after giving me the Apostolic Blessing to convey to the Abbot and all the community, he said to me in his characteristic, distinct tone of utterance, these exact words, 'Tell my dear Fathers the Mechitarists to promote biblical studies'.

young man, superior of the Persian mission, a monk of angelic life, who wore a heavenly smile in all his troubles, and was a short time ago martyred through hatred of the faith. having his tongue cut out 'because he had preached' against error, the followers of which thus thought they would have revenge.

And how can I even mention in this brief summary those hundreds of other missionaries who suffered, for the true faith, persecutions, privations, imprisonment and all kinds of discomfort, and whose names are written in the *Book of Life*! God Alone rewards their labours, that God for Whom they lived and died, as they had been bidden by their leader and master, Abbot Mechitar¹.

1. In the *Catholic Echo*, (an. 1912, no. 69, p. 659) the writer of the *Life* of the Servant of God, Ter Comitas, describing the state of the Armenian nation at the beginning of the 18th century, and the renaissance of the Catholic spirit by means of some secular priests, such as Ter Comitas, adds, 'Similarly with some religious vardapiets, who were the sons of the famous Abbot Mechitar. Mechitar himself was in Constantinople and worked to strengthen his Congregation, which in the following centuries with its glorious offspring was to be the *Saviour of the Armenian nation*'.

The Mechitarian Community of Vienna, independently established at Vienna in 1811, also gave various renowned missionaries for the faith.

CAP T E R X I I I .

Mechitar, restorer of Armenian literature¹.

1. The re-awakening given by Mechitar to the study of the Armenian language and literature. — 2. The wonderful versatility of his literary genius. — 3. His great assiduity for the reading of the Holy Scripture and the Fathers. — 4. He begins to publish the works of others. — 5. His inactivity at Modon. — 6. His great activity at Venice. — His own printing-press. — 7. His stupendous edition of the Bible. — Letter of praise from Pope Benedict XIV. — 8. Mechitar's writings — 9. Spiritual works. — Praises to the Virgin-Mother. — 10. Liturgical hymns. -- 11. Theological works. — Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew. — 12. Works on science and mathematics. — 13. Philological treatises. — Armenian grammar of the classic tongue, of the spoken language. — 14. His great dictionary of the Armenian language. — 15. Translated works. — 16. Correspondence.

1. It would be an unpardonable fault, if, in weaving the life of Abbot Mechitar, I were not to refer, no matter how briefly, to the great merits of the Servant of God in sounding the literary re-awakening of the Armenian nation. We must even note

1. Concerning Abbot Mechitar as Restorer of the Armenian language and literature, as also about his theological and poetical works, two authors have written with special competence, F. John Torossian in his much appreciated 'Life of Abbot Mechitar' and F. Basil Sarkissian in his 'History of Mechitarian Literature.

with all sincerity that, while the Catholic part of the nation venerates him and extol him as the re-awakener of the faith and of old Catholic traditions, as a champion of the teaching of the Church of Rome, and at the same time as the restorer of the golden age of Armenian literature, another part, cut off from Rome and obeying the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, glorifies him, exalts him to the skies as a renovator of the Armenian language, as founder and first head of a school which began, continued and still continues unwearingly researches and publications of writings and facts which appertain to Armenian history and literature. In this school first place is given to the study of the patrology and classics of Armenia in the first centuries of Christianity. So many publications have issued forth from it that it gave an impetus to the Christian schools of the West and was an invaluable aid to the study of the history of the Christian faith, and of Greek, Armenian, Syriac and Latin Fathers.

2. Mechitar, in the midst of so many occupations, among so much physical and moral labour, through his continual struggles to reach his ideal, surrounded by such opposition and such fierce accusations (born charitably and resignedly) that he had to write incessantly with all the strength of his intellect to frustrate them, — this man, wholly given up to prayer and the contemplative life, found time to think out with all the calmness of mind and spirit, to compose and to publish spiritual and ascetic books, dogmatic, didactic, poetical, linguistic and scientific works, treating every argument with scrupulous research and vast erudition. Several of these writings are master-pieces, one of which would have been sufficient to immortalize the author's name. Such are his edition of the Bible, his rich and profound Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew, his voluminous and judicious Dictionary of the Armenian language and other enormous compositions which reveal an elevated and ready mind which could utilize for the public good the hours he could spare from his occupations in the

community. It was on account of this alertness of his that his contemporaries wrote of him, 'He had a mind ready to understand the most difficult matters, profound and sharp in fathoming subtle questions, perspicacious in the search for truth, and he was gifted with a prodigious memory'¹. By reason of these mental qualities he excelled in various branches of study and from his youth produced fruits which both charm and astonish.

3. To these gifts we must add another — his great application. We have seen that from very childhood he burned with an unquenchable thirst for spiritual reading and the study of the Fathers of the Church. He endangered his sight and his life, but he never parted company with those very few books printed and still extant in Armenian, which he read and re-read so often as to know them by heart. Then he travelled to hermitages and monasteries to find something new to read, particularly in the heated theological questions which separated the East from the West. In such readings he found pleasure and satisfaction to the full. They exercised a powerful influence on his soul, which, on the death of his two saintly teachers, was guided by the spirit of God, by means of prayer, meditation and spiritual reading. He perfectly understood that good reading raises and educates, as bad reading lowers and destroys the soul. Hence it was, that, since there was a dearth of good books accessible to all, scarcely had he arrived in Constantinople, than he strove to find the necessary means, and set himself and his companions to the task of publishing the works of others and spreading them abroad throughout Armenia. This took place in the year 1700, when the Congregation was not yet founded.

4. During the bloody persecutions of the Patriarchs Avetic and John of Smyrna, he gathered

1. Archbishop Stephen Akonz, 'Life of Abbot Mechitar'. Chap XXVIII, p. 289, Ed. 1810.

his companions into a secluded house where in their free moments they busied themselves with printing and binding books. It was fortunate for him that the celebrated Osgan, vardapiet, transferred his printing-press to Constantinople from Amsterdam.

The first book Mechitar published in Constantinople was the golden volume of the *Imitation of Christ*, a copy of which he had always kept, divided into two parts, which served him and his pupil John alternately. He never forgot this circumstance and he wished that each one of his disciples should carry about in his pocket this incomparable booklet for the guidance of his soul. Then came meditation - books, catechisms and commentaries on Holy Scripture.

5. However, this activity of the Servant of God was stopped short by Avetic's persecution and Mechitar's flight to Modon. In this city he found himself in entirely new surroundings, as he mentions in one of his letters. Far removed from the national centre, out of communication with the few, yet worthy, theologians of his own country, and compelled to concentrate his attentions on the material and moral existence of his Community, he could do nothing. But on his arrival at Venice amongst an important and advanced Armenian colony, he had scarcely put in order the little necessary for comfortable living under the roof of St. Lazarus, than he returned to his former activity.

6. Venice was not unaccustomed to Armenian printed books. As we saw, the first book printed in Armenian was the first-fruits of Venice in 1513. There had followed other books from the presses of Alberti, Anthony Bartoli, and Demetrins of Theodosins. Mechitar came to Venice in 1715 and in 1719 there came forth to the light of day from these printing-offices, the 'Spiritual Garden' and 'Christian Meditations'. A year later appeared the 'New Testament', the 'Book of Vices', the 'Book of Virtues', the last two translated by a certain F. James, vardapiet of Nakhitchewan.

These publications and others which followed,

whether original or translated, were diffused incredibly more, when Mechitar, in the year 1729, by means of a friendly benefactor, managed to buy over Osgan's old and almost abandoned printing-press in Amsterdam. He had it transported to Venice, arranged it accurately and enriched it shortly after. Thus he set going the renowned, polyglot press, which, after its transference from the city to St. Lazarus on the 2nd of March, 1789¹, went forward with giant steps and obtained the highest premiums at all the industrial Exhibitions of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The first great work that came forth from Mechitar's own printing-press was the edition of the Bible. The first Armenian version of the Holy Scriptures was *printed* in 1666 in Amsterdam by Osgan. This edition from its being the first of its kind has great merits and is greatly valued. A second edition appeared in Constantinople in 1705 from the hands of a certain Peter surnamed 'the Latin'. It was made on the lines of the former edition and was even printed by Osgan. But copies of it were rare, and it was so dear that it could hardly be purchased by the rich. Hence poor ecclesiastics and the great part of the faithful gained nothing by it.

This circumstance sorely grieved Mechitar, who was burning with a vehement desire to prepare an edition of the Bible. He always believed it necessary to confront the Armenian translation with the Greek, Syriac and Latin versions and so it was altogether providential that he just then lighted upon a bible in seven languages which was for sale in Venice, and was printed in 1645. It was written in Hebrew, Samaritan, Syriac, Chaldean, Arabic, Greek and Latin. Mechitar did trouble about his poverty, but bought the book and set himself to the difficult and painstaking task of comparing each version with the help of the best amongst his disciples. He says in

1. Annals of the Congregation, Vol. II. p. 758.

the preface to this work that beginning from Genesis and confronting phrase by phrase, he was pleased to see that the Armenian version corresponded word for word with the Greek and Syriac, and that the very few variants were evidently errors in writing



Pópe Benedict XIV.

or printing. When a considerable portion of the work of comparison had been completed, he began to print it with untiring care and exceptional attention. Six persons were told off to correct and another stood beside the press to watch the last corrections and the whole process of the work. The

great part of the expenses was for a wonderfully artistic copy, rich in engravings, flowers, fantastic ornamentation, and capital letters — a really colossal work and one of astonishing beauty. The printing of this Bible began in June, 1733, and was finished in November, 1735.

Indescribable was Mechitar's joy at reaching the desired goal. His first thought was to send a copy bound with real Venetian art to the great Pope, Benedict XIV¹.

Great was the Pontiff's satisfaction and he blessed with all his heart the holy work of the Servant of God. He was pleased also to send him the following letter:

Beloved Son, Health and Apostolic Benediction

We received yesterday from the hands of the Secretary of Propaganda the worthy present, so welcomed by Us, of the Armenian Bible, and We return you heartfelt thanks. We likewise thank you and your monks for the fruit you are obtaining on your missions, and embracing you all with paternal affection, We impart to you and your good monks the Apostolic Blessing.

22nd September, 1742.

8. Stengthened and joyful at receiving the Holy Father's blessing, in whose letter mention had been

1. This Pope has often been called the Oriental Pope. Few have done more than he for the Reunion of the Churches. His work for the Copts was such that to-day his is pronounced by them with the tenderness of loving sons. cf. Renaudin, 'Questions Religieuses Orientales'. He was also an eminent theologian and jurist. As Cardinal Lambertini and later as Sovereign Pontiff he wrote with consummate skill and erudition on almost every question in the whole range of theology and canon law and is quoted to-day with eagerness. His works form 12 folio volumes. His activity, too, in art and architecture, while Ruler of the Papal States, is witnessed by the fact that wherever one turns in the city of Rome one sees his name on many a handsome edifice (Tr.).

made not only of this stupendous work, but also of the missions, the Servant of God continued to publish other works for the good of souls and the moral education of his country.

Since it is not within the scope of this work to dwell at length on Mechitar as the head of the renaissance of Armenian literature, we shall merely summarize his various works in different branches of study, and to facilitate matters we shall class them under five headings:

- I. Spiritual writings.
- II. Theological and philosophical works.
- III. Scientific treatises.
- IV. Linguistic works and Dictionaries.
- V. Translations and publications.

9. His spiritual compositions come before all others, because they were nearer to his heart, his feelings, his moral and physical life; they were his whole existence. Among these there are known:

1. Spiritual Praises.
2. Hymns.
3. Exercises of prayer.
4. Meditations on life.
5. Counsels to missionaries.
6. Admonitions.
7. Prayer – book for priests.
8. Catechism in the literary language.
9. Catechism in the spoken tongue.

Among these writings his Praises and Hymns have a particular character, a vibrating chord. When but fourteen years old, he was already a poet and adapter of his verse to his own music. He composed with the greatest ease sacred praises in rhymed verse in the classic tongue and set them to sweet and melodious music, teaching it afterwards to his acquaintances. From them it passed to the townsfolk, and then from one city to another, so that while still young he heard his hymns sung in other lands. These very hymns handed down through generations I have heard sung on feast-days, though the people who sing them do not know who was the author of such verses and such harmony. The hymn which begins

‘We implore thee, Mother of God
Temple of the Word Incarnate’,

full of wonderful titles of the Most Holy Mother, composed many years before he became acquainted with the Litany of Loretto, is like a bouquet of sweet-smelling flowers offered to the Blessed Virgin by the Servant of God in his youth, and is sung even to-day at St. Lazarus and in some parts of Armenia with admiration and enthusiasm on the solemn festivals of Our Lady, at the Morning Office. The same beauty is to be admired in the other ‘Praise’ which begins:

‘Holy and Blessed Virgin
Have mercy on me
Cure my blindness of mind
And help me to see, etc’

It is made up of 1,500 rhymed strophes and is full of expressions which could only come from a strong oriental imagination. I should be too monotonous, were I to give a sample of all his ‘Praises’ to the Blessed Virgin, for they are so numerous. Some of them were referred to in the course of this work, such as those written when his eyes were troubling him. To this occasion there belongs an ode which begins, ‘Unspeakable Altar, receptacle of the Word’, and another, ‘My eye grew painful; Thou, O Mary, cure it, and others in the same strain. In those sad moments, Mechitar, though sightless, never complained, never breathed a sigh of impatience, but simply smiled and sang to his heavenly Mother, and with his mind he travelled through celestial light to the sight of supernal happiness and the luminous joys of the Blessed Virgin from whom he expected light to his soul and to his eyes.

One of his inspired, genial and touching odes is the Mother of God’s lullaby at the cradle of the Infant Jesus, and the hymn of the Mother of Sorrows when her Divine Son was taken down from the cross. This hymn, like another *Stabat Mater*, is sung

in some dioceses of Catholic Armenia at the procession of the Cross on Good Friday. These verses often form with the initial letters the name of Mechitar — a custom common in his day, and even before in the days of St. Nerses *the Graceful* and other holy Armenian Fathers. In verse are to be found also Praises to the Most Holy Trinity, to the Saviour Jesus, to St. Gregory the Illuminator, to the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul, to St. Stephen the Protomartyr, and to St. Anthony the Abbot. The last mentioned is full of a poetically melancholic spirit and was written, as we saw in chap. XIV, at a time of great mental agony, when he was making for Rome to defend some of his missionaries in the East.

10. Besides his 'Praises', he wrote many liturgical hymns, which are partly lost, but in part extant. Of those saved from so many dangers there are his hymns to the Holy Name of Jesus; the Holy Name of Mary and St. Joseph, which are sung on the respective feast days in the Mechitarian Congregations; and, since these festivals were not to be found in the Armenian calendar, he recommended his disciples to conform to the Latin Church on this point and celebrate these feasts as in the Gregorian calendar. These hymns and praises were, in the editions published by the Servant of God, ornamented with delicate designs which he had executed by the best artists of his day. I reproduce here the wood-cut he had prefixed to the above-mentioned lullaby, in which the Blessed Virgin is telling St. John the Baptist not to awaken the Divine Child.

Among the other spiritual works of Mechitar, particularly important is the Catechism written in the popular tongue. He had already written and published it in the classical language, but he perceived that the people could not understand it, so he then reduced it to popular form in 1725 — a thing unheard-of before his time — and he added a dictionary to it, so that whoever had learnt to read, should read nothing else for exercise or study but this Catechism. He was thus the first to raise the spoken language, give it its proper place and

introduce it into religious instruction. He gave great importance to the study of catechism and recommended his missionaries everywhere to pay special attention to the teaching of it.



The Infant Jesus sleeps (*from an old wood-cut*).

11. Besides spiritual and contemplative works he took great care in preparing theological treatises and explanations of Sacred Scripture. He therefore composed with great ardour and painstaking labour the following:

1. Commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel.
2. » » the Canticle of Canticles.
3. » » » Psalms.
4. » » » Old Testament.
5. *Defence of those who communicate under one species only.*

His first Commentary is a vast work of 1010 pages in 8vo, a profound work in which one sees the great erudition of the Servant of God in Holy Scripture and the Fathers, above all in St. John Chrysostom, his inspirer and guide in all his commentaries. There is no question of theology which is not treated in this work. He faces the deepest and most difficult concepts of the Trinity and Incarnation with the most wonderful and natural simplicity. He gives us twenty large pages to explain the union of the two natures in the one person of Christ and all with great clearness and learning. He is at home in sacred history, biblical archeology, the geography, customs and rites of the people of Israel. It is at the same time the work of the moralist and preacher, and as from a pulpit he lashes all vices, vainglory and luxury, he exhorts the embracing of the holy principles of Christianity, he opens up the way of perfection to people of every condition of life, sheep and shepherds, and with high and noble sentiments he shows how heavenly love can proceed along with the love of one's country, and faith with science. This Commentary alone was sufficient to place Abbot Mechitar among the first theologians and philosophers of his time. In it he combats all the errors which had crept and still were creeping into his country, and with clear and effective words he teaches all the principles of the Holy Roman Church, whose supremacy he bases on Our Blessed Lord's words to Peter (Mt. ch. 16, vv. 18-19).

The Servant of God wished, too, that his disciples should be sufficiently versed in humanities. All his unedited treatises on rhetoric, philosophy and mathematics are written in the form of lessons given to his pupils. In his work on mathematics of 373

pages, besides arithmetic and geometry, there are disquisitions, as was customary then, on astronomy, calendars, music, optics and gravitation. It is clear that these compositions on mathematics and physics are not the fruit of personal observation or calculation but are intelligently chosen from works of the period, which as time went on and new inventions came to light, were perfected and even modified. Nevertheless they excite our curiosity and show us how eager the Abbot was to instruct his sons in science also, though of course he gave primary importance to the education of the soul by the practice of virtue and by cultivating those studies which directly lead to the souls's spiritual perfection.

13. After Mochitar's immense love of his Lord, our Creator and Saviour and the source of all good, come his love for his neighbour, and particularly for his beloved country — that unhappy and abandoned nation of Armenia. Hence it is no wonder that after writing spiritual and theological works he should with equal ardour turn his attention to the re-awakening of his national language, which had fallen from its golden splendour into obscurity and oblivion, transformed in all its idioms and rules under the press of foreign importations. Those few ecclesiastics who had pursued their studies at Propaganda, where there was a chair of Armenian, gave the grammar and peculiarities of this language a Latin and foreign stamp.

Mechitar as a child, boy and young man knew no other language but Armenian and was fed only on the classical diction of the Armenian Fathers; hence he understood the strangeness of the situation, was deeply pained at this decadence and barbarism, and nurtured the plan of purifying and stereotyping his mother-tongue and bringing it back to its pristine splendour. He was greatly encouraged in his project by those few *littérateurs* and priests who, fired with enthusiasm as they saw the dawn of a new era reflected from Mechitar's person, felt great discomfort and mortification when they thought of the darkness of the past and the present.

Mechitar, in the first years of his apostolate, was too busy with the cares of his new-born Congregation to continue or complete a work he had already begun, 'A Grammar of Classical Armenian'; so this important volume did not appear until the year 1730, in the printing office of Anthony Bartoli, Venice. This book, which aroused immediately a great enthusiasm and was the foundation-stone of that colossal and architectonic philological edifice brought to completion by his illustrious sons, particularly in the 19th century, is not without its defects, and in some parts Mechitar himself confesses that he is not free but is held back by the circumstances of his time from breaking every bond of prescription and prematurity. Nevertheless he will always be considered the pioneer of the agitation for the purity of the Armenian tongue. The first great step was made and the tendency to receive foreign idioms had been given a mighty check.

Mechitar did not limit his attentions to the circle of the learned or the higher classes, but omitted nothing which would benefit the mass of the people. He saw that they were not prepared to avail themselves of the classical grammar, so, the first time the thought struck him, he set himself to the task with a real literary audacity, and unmindful of the execrations of the intellectuals, planned out and composed a grammar of the spoken tongue, to which he gave such an importance, such form, and such a powerful impetus that it made wonderful progress in the latter half of the 19th century, when it became the common language of all — learned and ignorant, poets and historians, theologians and orators¹.

1. Two celebrated sons of Mechitar: F. Arsenius Bagratuni and F. Arsenius Aidinian (Archbishop), the former of the Congregation of Venice, the other of Vienna, were the greatest authorities in grammar in the 19th century. The first-mentioned specialized in the classic language, the second in the spoken tongue.

14. When he began his literary grammar, he knew that besides knowing the rules it was necessary to know the meaning of the words, so he saw the absolute need of a dictionary. In spite of his multifarious duties he set about this difficult task too, and in the year 1727 he began his enormous and erudite Armenian dictionary, containing 1251 pages with double columns, which is rich beyond measure, full quotations from classical authors, and executed with a remarkable clearness, such as was beginning more and more to distinguish the writings of the Servant of God. The great difficulty in this work consisted in the fact that there were no preceding works of such a nature. There had already appeared two dictionaries, but of very limited comprehension, the one at Propaganda in the year 1695 by Deodatus Nersesovitch, and the other in 1698 by the vardapiet Jeremiah of Meghri; but these works contained but the words of the Bible and the Breviary, and took no account of the classical authors, especially of the Armenian Fathers. In this arduous undertaking Mechitar was helped by two of his disciples. It was compiled in the year 1745 and was immediately set to type, but in the year 1749, when the last sheets were being printed, the Servant of God, overcome by a serious illness, went to his last repose before he could see it completed.

A contemporary of his, the learned vardapiet Stepahanus Roshkan, of Stanislau in Poland, had begun a similar work and we find in his correspondence with the Abbot certain observations which show us his keenness of mind. But he had no influence on Mechitar's work.

On the death of the Servant of God, his disciples acquired new codices, found new words and formed a new supplement which was then published. The appearance of this Armenian dictionary raised the country to the highest pitch of enthusiasm for the name of Mechitar and he was greeted with the title of 'Second Illuminator'. Letters of praise and congratulation poured in from Constantinople and

all parts of Asia Minor. Innumerable copies were asked for and the first boxes which were dispatched to the colonies in the Indies were literally pounced upon, so that almost all the copies were run out. Then especially did Mechitar's fellow-countrymen assume the responsibility of coming to the aid of the Mechitarian Congregation in its sacred mission of spreading good literature, when the inspirer and initiator of this enterprise which had cost such immense sacrifices, had already flown to heaven.

15. This printed dictionary was our hero's last work. We have elsewhere mentioned in particular other compositions of which he was the author, but, what is more, he translated several writings of other authors. His very first work which, when the Community had been transplanted to Venice, he made every sacrifice to print, was the translation of a treatise on which he wished to found the studies of his pupils, viz, 'The Elements of Theology', by Blessed Albert the Great. He also translated 'The Paradise of the Soul' by the same author, 'The Art of saving one's soul' and 'The Voice of Christ'. Among his translated works we must also include the unedited translation of the 'Summa Theologica' of the angelic St. Thomas, to which his disciples later gave a more easy style.

16. Besides these writings which would have enriched several lives, he left behind him an extensive correspondence of several hundred letters, treating of dogmatic theology, moral theology, liturgy, counsels for the missions, advice asked by bishops and prelates, by friends of every class and condition of life, and in all he showed himself to be a profound yet humble soul, wise and simple, with a word of comfort, encouragement, inspiration and example to all. His letters were coveted by everyone and tradition says that they were listened to by the faithful standing and were reverently kissed by those who received them, so great was the veneration for the Servant of God, adorned by the Lord

with divine and human knowledge, with simple and heroic virtue¹.

1. We mentioned earlier in this book how the immortal Maronite Orientalist, Assemani, called Abbot Mechitar his great friend and a man famed for learning and piety. From amongst the many letters received by the Servant of God I think it worth while choosing out this interesting one, which will show us how far his reputation had spread. The communication is from the learned Dominican, Peter Du Four, who wrote from Paris in the month of August, 1749, believing the Servant of God to be still alive:

“To the Most Reverend and Most Illustrious Lord Mkitar⁽¹⁾, Abbot of the Armenian religious, Peter Du Four,, of the Order of Friars Preachers, Professor of Sacred Theology and an ardent student of the Haican⁽²⁾ people and their language, wishes excellent health.

Although I have never had the pleasure of seeing you face to face, Most Illustrious Sir, and though I am a foreigner nevertheless I am confident that in your courtesy you will do me the favours I ask from you. Since the love of truth and the study of letters make fast friends of those whom God in His providence has separated by great distances, I have no doubt that you will receive kindly this preconceived ardour of mine for Armenian learning, cherish it and enkindle it more and more. However, that you may the more easily extend to me the help I humbly ask for, permit me to lay bare to you briefly the state of my studies.

For the past six months I have been studying your language along with three companions, under the direction and tuition of the famous Abbot of Villefroy, a renowned master of Oriental literature, who has perused all the Armenian codices of the Royal Library and has made a synopsis of them. After we had learnt to read and had been taught by him the rudiments of the Armenian grammar, we translated the Psalter as far as that was possible without the *Dictionarium Rivolaicum*. Then we set about translating into French the poem “*Hetmo tacarorin Haïos*” (i. e. Concerning Hetum, King of the Armenians). Now

(1). In transcribing or translating documents the original spelling has been maintained, even when erroneous (Tr).

(2). Haican means Armenian. See Appendix II.

that we have finished this work, our ardour is impelling us forward to greater things.

While spending our time studying the Armenian tongue, we have no intention, kind sir, of learning the language of a far-off people, merely to fool the uninitiated with a foolish show of foreign erudition, or obtain a vain celebrity among the great unwashed. It is not for glory's sake but for the furtherance of the public good, as it becomes honest and religious men, that we are so eager. If any fruit were to be expected from our labours, we should desire nothing more earnestly than to represent in its native colours and make known to Frenchmen that country of yours, which has been so illustrious both in its religious traditions, its progress in science and in all the fine arts, and show to our people what grand things pertaining to learning, morals and eloquence are to be found among your writers. We therefore implore you by any bonds of charity which may link you to us who are unknown to you, to send us a list of the principal authors in history, poetry, theology and sacred oratory, from the translation of whose works some good might accrue to religion and the Church.

We are already acquainted with the prince of Armenian historians, Moses of Choren, who was introduced into Latium by the two Wistons. These two writers have merited well of your country and indeed of the whole kingdom of letters, though their translation is not judged correct by some Armenians. This I often heard from that excellent man John Baltazar, of Armenian origin, who also bade me write to you. So great then is the antiquity of this writer from Choren, so faithful and concise his works that to hear him speak French is bound to please us French. But he has written many things, which, though we do not believe them to be false, nevertheless we are incapable of defending, as far as their historic value is concerned, against the great ones in our land. I mean the critics, who reject as fictitious, for example, whatever is written about the relations of Christ with King Abgar. Perhaps you have with you some documents to refute the objections of these critics.

We have also from the Royal Library, Most Illustrious Abbot, twenty-three homilies of St. Gregory the Illuminator, with a panegyric of John, Vartabed of Ezing, but we have a scruple as to whether they are the real and genuine writings of the most holy Patriarch. We have the same anxiety concerning an "Instruction" of his for imbuing Armenians with the Christian religion.

We were very pleased to see that your poetry has rhyme and metre in it, otherwise than in Hebrew poetry, which is without rhyme or metre, and consists merely in dignity of sentences and diction and in splendour and harmony of imagery. I have heard that one of your Doctors has turned into Armenian verse the second part of the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas. Has he finished it? Besides the Hayton who is the author of the above-mentioned poem, Galanus makes mention of two other Haytons: one a prince of Curchi, a contemporary and relative of the former, the other a King of Armenia who laid down the sceptre in the hands of his son Leo about the year 1270, and is said to have entered religion. We should like to know from you if this one perhaps became a Dominican, just as the author of the poem became a Franciscan about the year 1307⁽¹⁾.

We therefore implore your charity to grant us these favours. Do not hesitate to send forth the rays of your learning and let us have word of whatsoever books you know. At the same time indicate to us where we can purchase these treasures of Armenian erudition. Above all do not forget to inform us about a dictionary, if you know of one. You have certainly noticed how deficient is Francis Rivola's dictionary, if you have read it. We think very little of it. We found Scheroder's grammar, published at Amsterdam, more useful.

Now we place all hope of future progress in you and in a glossary manuscript of seven hundred pages in folio, to be found in the Royal Library, containing all the words of the language, a half of which has been written out by one of us in an incredibly short space of time. I do not doubt, Most Illustrious Abbot, but that you will lend us the support of your learning and will second our zealous efforts with every means at your command. I certainly believe that you would love us if you knew how zealous we are for Armenians, and how fervently we pray to the omnipotent God that He may keep you in health for many years, to the glory and honour of your country. Farewell.

Paris 12th. Aug. 1749.

(1). See Chap XII. 6

CHAPTER XIX.

The New Monastery of St. Lazarus.

1. The new buildings at St. Lazarus. — 2. The church. — The altars. — 3. Count Sheriman and Archbishop Minas, benefactors. — 4. Other benefactors. — 5. The chapel of St. Benedict. — 6. The Novitiate. — The scholasticate. — 7. The Refectory. — The Library. — 8. Other constructions. — 9. Hospitality to visitors. — An Ambassadors of the Most Serene. — 10. The Venetian patrician Peter Marcello confined on the island by the Venetian Republic.

1. All these enlightened cares for the spiritual and intellectual education of his youths, all his eagerness and fatigue for the advancement of the missions, and his innumerable literary and material occupations did not prevent Abbot Mechitar in his straits and his poverty from contemplating and maturing in his mind and executing the constructions necessary for the proper housing of his family, the observance of monastic discipline and study. He found the island of St. Lazarus like a desert and following the example of so many monks, friars and nuns who among the islets of this Venetian lagoon had raised up gorgeous sanctuaries and retreats, such as St. George by the Benedictines; St. Helena, the pearl of the lagoon, by the Olivetans; the Desert by the Franciscans; St. Michael, by the Camaldolese; St. Clement, Poveglia, Holy Spirit, the Redeemer and many others which even to-day are the object of so many pilgrimages, Mechitar wished to build a monastery, confiding in the Mother of God to whom he had vowed all — life and breath. He showed a particular capacity and intelligence for architecture, surveyed the execution of every

work and finally created that retreat at once austere and bright, which causes connoisseurs to wonder, and defies all words of praise and appreciation.



The Church of St. Lazarus (*before the last restorations*).

2. After building some cells for the monks, his first aspiration was to beautify God's house as far as his humble means permitted him. He even paid no attention to their scarcity, well knowing that

God would bless the work and crown his holy desires.

The church was low and dark. The Abbot's first care was to raise the walls and vault the roof, sustaining it with arches and six marbles columns. He built a new high altar completely of marble and put in a choir with stalls as in Latin churches. In the nave he put two altars -- one, to the right, dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, a votive altar of the Congregation, another, to the left, in honour of St. Antony the Abbot, the Father of Oriental monasticism. He erected two other altars contiguous to the high altar, one of the Holy Crucifix, the other of St. Gregory the Illuminator, who converted the whole Armenian nation.

These four altars were simple at the beginning and made of common stone, but later on, while the Servant of God was still alive, the columns, the parapets, the tympanum and other accessories were changed for magnificent marble. To carry out these improvements Mechitar had national benefactors. For the altar of the Madonna he had the noble and generous Armenian Lord, Count Sahrad Sheriman, domiciled in Venice as is testified by the palace and the foundations bearing his name, in the parish of the Holy Apostles, the same one who left a large sum of money to the city for works of charity, and extended the Orphanage which is called after the Doge Manin¹. The noble Count Sheriman became very ill in the year 1735 and the doctors declared his cure beyond human art. Then he had recourse to the Madonna and in his heart made a vow to adorn her altar with marble, trusting to obtain the grace of a cure. Mechitar heard of the vow, got all his disciples to pray together to Our Lady, and in a few days despite the doctors' prediction, the

1. Though often his countrymen asked that, through justice to this noble Armenian, this pious edifice be at least named Sheriman - Manin.



Votive Altar to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin.

invalid left his bed. Then he not only kept his vow by transforming the whole altar of the Mother of God into marble, but in front of it prepared his tomb with an epitaph, and there he was laid to rest in the year 1745¹.

A year after the Madonna-altar had been put up, there came to St. Lazarus, drawn by his affection for and esteem of the Servant of God, Archbishop Minas of Smyrna. As we already saw, he had been asking permission from the Holy see for several years to retire to Mechitar's monastery and busy himself solely in the salvation of his soul. At first the Holy see would not listen to his fervent appeals, believing him indispensable for his own diocese and for Asia Minor. But when the heat of persecution had calmed down and he continued to press his point, Propaganda finally gave him the desired permission, and the Archbishop, after going to Rome to venerate the tombs of the Apostles and receive the Pope's blessing, retired then to Venice where he spent nearly all his time on St. Lazarus island, wishing to live on the same footing as the simple monks. He could not find words to express his interior, intense satisfaction at the sight of the spiritual and studious life of Mechitar's sons. He obtained from the Servant of God permission to make the altar of St. Antony the Abbot like that of Our Lady, and put at the side of it his tomb with an epitaph written on it describing his life. He was interred in this last resting-place in the year 1757.

1. Towards this altar of the Madonna Queen Margaret of Savoy has a particular devotion, and at her every visit, the first thing she does is to go and pray on her knees before the picture of Our Lady. As a souvenir of her devotion she had made in 1880 a most beautiful lamp in chiselled bronze, and presented it to the altar. On the occasion of the bi-centenary of the Congregation (1901) she presented to the high altar a rich, sumptuous curtain of notched velvet, 15 ft. 9 ins high, by 18 ft. 9 ins. broad, which is use in High Mass in the Armenian rite.

4. These two principal altars having thus been seen to, there remained those beside the high altar. In 1737 three Armenian merchants resident in Venice: Zachary Davidian, St. Stephan Vertanessian, and Nahapet Poghossian, covered St. Gregory's altar with handsome marble, and had a picture painted representing the great saint in the act of baptizing the Armenian royal family. Francis Zugno, one of the most renowned of Tiepolo's pupils, did the work. The altar of Holy Cross was adorned with like marble by Count Stephen Sheriman. Already since 1717 Count James Serpos, of Armenian nationality, had covered the pavement with marble. To complete the decorations substantial aid was given by the patrician Nani Mocenigo, a great admirer of Abbot Mechitar.

5. After finishing the church, the Servant of God erected (1738) on the first storey of the monastery an oratory in honour of St. Benedict, whose rule and patronage had been adopted by the Mechitarian Congregation. This chapel had but one altar made of most beautiful French marble, with columns, parapet and tympanum of the same material. In the centre of the altar was a picture representing the holy Patriarch rapt in a vision from heaven, a work of the Armenian painter, John Emirian (1741) who resided at Rome. His correspondence with the Servant of God, which is to be found in the Collection of letters, testifies to the filial and respectful sentiments with which he was animated.

6. Whilst the house of God was being thus made more beautiful every year, such other constructions were in course of completion as were necessary for the proper course of the monastic life and study. We have mentioned the building of the first cells, the erection of the Novitiate, situated towards the south, and looking towards the Isola del Lido and the Adriatic, the formation of the scholasticate with its grand panorama looking east to the city of Venice. When in 1726 he had traced out the plan of the Novitiate with its chapel, the lecture-halls, the recreation-rooms and the garden, Mechitar wrote

to Father Elias, his esteemed Counsellor, 'The apartments of the young novices are extremely beautiful. May God grant that the students be as beautifully furnished with virtue and wisdom'. In these few words are contained all his desires. He took great care of the material edifice but this care could not stand comparison with his ardent desire to perfect the moral edifice, which was his only ideal and the object of his prayers to God.

7. Later on Mechitar built an airy and well-lighted refectory, looking south. In the centre was the reader's pulpit, and the most rigorous and sacred silence was observed during the whole of the meal. Above the refectory was the library, a perfect gem of architecture and pleasant airiness. Even here the Abbot was sole architect and executor, directing and watching over the work. All the book-cases were made of cherry-wood and inlaid in a grave architectonic style, whilst the ceiling was covered with frescoes by the above-mentioned Zugno, that brilliant gem of Venetian art. It would be tedious to enumerate all the new buildings erected. He confined his attention to what was absolutely necessary, but what he did he did well and with the taste of an artist. This is testified by all the establishments he renewed, from the windows and the borders of the well to the kitchen. Everything was planned and supervised by him notwithstanding his multifarious occupations and tribulations, for one necessary thing did not impede another in one whose conscience was so calm and serene, that it furnished that wonderful and well-measured activity whence everything proceeds quickly yet surely. When he came to Rome to justify his missionaries and treat of other questions, he worked day and night in writing out his defence and visiting the cardinals, yet he found time to forward to St. Lazarus minute details on the measurements of the windows and the wood and arches of the stairs. I must add, too, that he designed and built the beautiful staircase which is near the refectory and leads to the first storey, and is the delight of so many engineers and architects.

8. However he did not wish others to know of or praise this natural gift of architecture nor would



The Refectory.

he permit his name to be in any way mentioned as being connected with the construction. At the repeated requests of the monks he thawed a little and allowed the following inscription in Armenian

and Latin to be placed on the refectory-door to mark the date:

*This Monastery was totally built
in the time of Abbot Mechitar,
son of Peter of Sebaste.*

1740



The Altar to Saint Benedict.

It is his humility which shines here, as elsewhere when he would not use the title Abbot, writing it

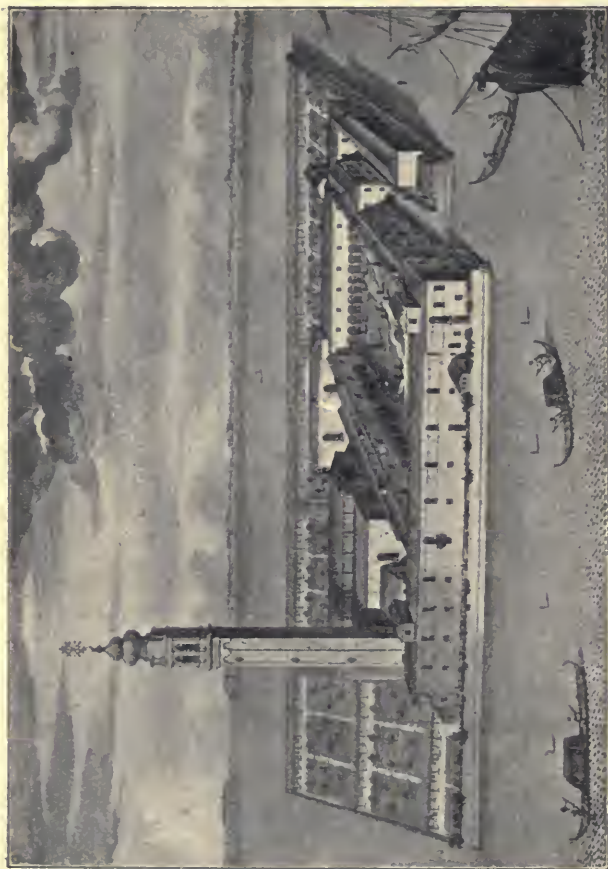
with a bad grace where it was necessary. So we often, nay almost always, meet the expression *Mechitar*,



The Library.

called *the Abbot*, whilst the whole Armenian people, when they spoke of *the Abbot*, meant *par excellence* Abbot Mechitar.

When he had completed the principal corridors and the guest-room on the ground-floor, where he placed also the dwellings of the boatsmen, garden-



The Island of St. Lazarus reconstructed by Abbot Mechitar (*from an old wood-cut*). (In the distance stretches the LIDO, then almost uninhabited and all sand).

ers and others who did not belong to the community, with an iron railing he shut off the monks' habitations with the law of strict enclosure, and while he was alive he was most stringent on this score, even to the highest in the land.

9. With reference to this, Archbishop Akonz relates in his 'Life' of the Abbot that an ambassador of the Most Serene Republic returning from Constantinople, was in quarantine on the island quite near to St. Lazarus. His wife, a noble Venetian patrician, came to greet him, and on the journey back to the city was compelled by a sudden hurricane to seek refuge on St. Lazarus. The Abbot had her brought to the guest-room and then went in person to see her. The Ambassadors who had heard great praises of the interior of the monastery, encouraged by Mechitar's kindness, expressed her great desire to visit the place. The Servant of God answered sweetly that he could not remove the law of enclosure. The intelligent and noble lady did not take this scrupulous refusal in bad part, but returned to Venice and spoke highly of the kind and dignified hospitality she received, and still more of the rigid, monastic discipline maintained by Mechitar.

10. If the Ambassadors's visit was but an accident, frequent on the other hand were the visits of those representatives of the Most Serene, setting out for the East, who sought information or sincere, intelligent advice. Nor were there wanting visits of the city-authorities who, along with the state-authorities, overwhelmed with attentions this community, which, though under a Power inimical to the Most Serene, was yet respected, loved and, I might almost say, caressed as a dear and precious object¹.

1. To show what confidence the Most Serene placed in the Mechitarian Community, I shall narrate the following circumstance taken from the Annals of the Armenian Congregation of the year 1759, ten years after the death of the Servant of God, during the reign of his immediate successor, Abbot Stephen Melconian.

"In the second half of the month of January preparations were made for a singular occurrence. The Government decided to relegate to our island the famous Peter Marcellus, a nobleman, count and cavalier, the only son of

the Grand Procurator and heir to his estates and all his possessions, since the said procurator had lately died, leaving behind him an annual income of 160,000 ducats. The above-mentioned Signor Marcello was about thirty years of age, gifted with great talents and uncommon qualities of mind, but bold and stubborn in character. Through his own fault he had been placed already in a dungeon for fifteen months, and then in another prison for two months, where he fell ill. The government, wishing to spare him his life, thought of placing him on our island, which had the name of having healthy air, in the hope of his retracting through the good example of the monks.

The chief-secretary of the government first of all summoned the Most Reverend Abbot and said to him, "By the absolute command of the Three you must hand over to us three rooms in your monastery to place a certain person there in custody". The Abbot answered, "Though we have not any convenient rooms to place at your disposal, still, such being the order of the government, kindly come in person and visit our convent and see what is the best place to put him in". The secretary agreed to this. On the 21st. of January he came accompanied by the government's architect. He inspected the whole of the convent and chose three rooms along from the Abbot's room, looking towards the south, and numbered 21, 22 and 23. Two days later one of the Council of the Three came in person and was pleased with the spot selected. The following day, the 23rd. of January, he sent masons and carpenters and bade them finish the work in four or five days or be sent to the gallows. They set about it in great haste, working even by night, and so by Saturday the 27th of the month had it completed. On this day one of the Three came and looked at the work and went away. The workmen followed him, and the architect brought the keys to the Council of the Three.

The construction consisted of this. The doors of the three rooms were walled up and two doorways were made in the interior to connect the rooms. The windows of rooms 21 and 22 were furnished with iron gratings, whilst the window of room 23 was made into a doorway, which opened on to a staircase leading to the garden. The salon of the old monks was turned into a room for the custodians. The doors were then locked with iron bolts, to prevent entrance from outside. But some time afterwards one of them had to be opened and — so the newspaper said — it was made a regular prison.

Then on the 30th of January Peter Marcellus was brought in a large covered ferry-boat and was interned in the new prison. Three military guards were placed there and the doors were shut up, the keys being handed over to the Abbot. He was ordered to let any of his monks visit the prisoner but no outsider, unless the latter had received the consent of the Three superior judges.

In the cell the condemned man had a German valet who received a monthly salary of six gold ducats. Our community was forbidden divulge the news that there was a person detained with us, though many certainly knew about it. For two months the convent prepared Marcellus and his attendants' food; then the government sent a prison-servant to be his cook. Two months later the gentleman was allowed go out of his prison and walk about the monastery, provided no strangers were near.

But, gradually getting bolder, he would go sometimes to the Lido. Occasionally his wife came and dined with him in the parlour near the door. The secretary, too, visited the place from time to time and inquired as to the condition of the prisoner, who passed the greater part of the day playing the violin and singing. He entered where he liked, danced along with his companions, and filled the convent with his revels. Besides he was almost without any religion, because he had with him a small silver trowel, a sign of freemasons(?)..... and had been round France in the past. He dressed himself up, too, in many different fashions, for he had a great deal of clothing; in a word, he had become insupportable at the monastery.

The good which the convent procured for him was that on the 18th of April a Jesuit father was sent for, who confessed him and his attendants, and the following day he received Holy Communion at the hands of our Abbot. On the 25th of April, either because it was his name-day or in honour of St. Mark the Evangelist (hence his name Marcellus) he gave a dinner to his three custodians and to three of our gardeners, and it was followed by fireworks. He did also one good thing. An assassin had fled from Mestre and took refuge on our island. The count, hearing of this, said to him, "Don't think you will save yourself here. Try to flee further away. Where you stop, find first of all a confessor, and atone for the crime you have committed". He gave him a ducat in alms and putting him into his own boat, let him down at the Lido, that is, at the beach whence he could make good his escape to a more secure spot.

On the 27th of April the count, not being able to stand the heat of his prison, came to live in the parlour near the convent-door. He had some colleagues in the city who endeavoured to help him to flee, but they never succeeded.

However the monastery was freed from him at last on the 5th of August, when, at two o'clock in the morning, the Secretary of State came to make the announcement that an order had been issued by the Council of Three to the effect that the prisoner was to leave the island and go to reside at Corfù for three years. This displeased him very much, for he hoped to be allowed go to his country seat and then return to his house at Venice. This would have been granted to him, if he had behaved respectably in the convent.

Thus on the 6th of August he was removed from the monastery. Attracted possibly by an offer of money, two of our domestics went with him and entered his service. One even followed him to Corfù and we had to get another servant in his stead.

The cells which had been turned into a prison were brought back to their original condition at the expense of the state.

CHAPTER XX.

The Virtues of the Servant of God.

1. The humility of Abbot Mechitar. — 2. His spirit of forgiveness. — 3. His kindness towards his enemies. — 4. His disinterestedness. — 5. His desire to see this virtue in his disciples. — 6. His love of poverty. — His kindness to the poor. — 7. His faith. — 8. His hope. — 9. His charity.

1. Far brighter than any other favour or gift of God, there shone in His servant (so say all who saw him) a profound and marked humility. Those who knew the austere and zealous monk, the priest burning with the love of his Lord, the founder of a Community which was adored by his countrymen for its spiritual and intellectual qualities, the restorer of Armenian literature, the author of so many profound and beneficial works, were astounded almost to unbelief that the great Abbot Mechitar, the *Second Illuminator*, the *Sun* of the Armenian nation was this humble monk. To his humility was joined a grave, noble, thoughtful bearing. No one ever saw him laugh or joke; he appeared to be always praying mentally. That lofty intellect, that inspired mind which soared to the highest spheres of Theology, found words to explain with admirable clearness the most difficult questions of Morals and Canon Law and busied itself with philological researches in the Armenian language, did not hesitate to help his children in their humble domestic needs. He did not disdain to take up a brush and sweep or polish where necessary, to cook food or prepare linen, stockings or cassocks; to assist the sick with assiduous care, to bring them food, and administer their

medicine regularly; and he always went about with such an encouraging and paternal air, with such a meekness and compassion, that thus he would often hasten the invalid's recovery.

His humility produced in him that mildness and kindness which, as the Apostle says, manifests to oneself one's defects and the perfections of others, by which one becomes always more humble, 'always more severe to oneself and more indulgent to others'. On this account those who in the beginning were his enemies and were envious of success, overcome by his humility and goodness, finally became his fastest friends. Some even came all the way to Venice to see and revere this man who was the pride of their country, and to return glory to God.

2. When he returned from Rome, victorious over his adversaries who had spread so many accusations against him throughout the Armenian world, caressed by the Pope, respected and encouraged by Eminent Cardinals, honoured by the highest among the clergy of the Eternal City, several persons from afar and near asked him, if he would not avenge himself, that at all events he would publish his victory and not humiliate himself before his enemies. But he only preached charity and pardon by means of which alone we can present ourselves confidently before the awful tribunal of Jesus Christ.

'I earnestly beseech you my dear friends', he wrote to the notabilities of Erzerum, 'that if in your city there be any among clergy or laity who despise us and our missionaries, treat them as we do. If you wish to know what we do, hear then. We love you because you are our friends, but we love these more, because they are our enemies. We serve you, but we serve them more. We pray for them more. Thus does the Catholic faith increase, thus do we fulfil the law of charity. Do you this too, and let it not be that to praise us you despise them, but treat them with all possible kindness, love them with your whole heart and do good to them'.

All his letters are full of these exhortations to

pardon and pray for one's enemies, whom he calls channels of God's grace, or salt, which when put on the wound pricks and pains, but disinfects and heals, or a hedge made of thorns, which protects the garden from the inroads of sin and passion. A host of other similes are to be found in his writings and in his letters to his missionaries, lest they should be cast down at hearing a judgment or an accusation against them, instead of continuing to work in their holy calling with zeal and charity for the good of souls and the glory of the Lord.

3. One of his many enemies who had accumulated so many accusations and had perpetrated so many odious crimes against the Abbot and his missionaries, was passing through Venice on his way to some other part of Europe, and, according to the sanitary regulations of the Most Serene Republic, had to put up with forty days of isolation in the lazaret of Venice. When the Servant of God heard of his arrival, he immediately sent him a bed and everything requisite for his proper housing, conveying to him for the whole forty days food and fruit from the monastery garden. When quarantine was over, the Abbot, on receiving permission, went to visit him twice. This person thought that Mechitar must be unaware of his hatred and of his inimical conduct towards him, but when he came to hear that Mechitar knew all, but did not for that reason fail in his duty of being charitable, he began to admire the heavenly virtues of the Servant of God and for the future was one of the most earnest supporters of the Mechitarian Congregation.

In the midst of such contradictions which lasted his whole life, he would only answer in the cause of truth and not to excuse himself. In a letter to a friend in the East, written on the 6th of June, 1717, he explains in this way why he wished to defend himself at Rome. 'If our enemies had attacked our capacity or challenged our teaching only, I should have been content, but since they impugned the holiest thing we cherish—our faith, I could not keep silent. If it were a question of knowledge or

reputation, we could say with the Apostle "We ignorant in Christ, you learned, you noble, we ignoble", but since they denied our faith, we have no example of a Saint who answered: "We are schismatics, you are Catholics". Therefore we cannot stand such a black accusation and we openly assert that they unjustly accuse us'. Never did he allow the defects of his calumniators to be known, though he had in his possession indisputable proofs. This made his enemies wonder and overcome, by his goodness and charitableness they became his admirers and friends.

4. His kindness and his spirit of forgiveness were equalled by his disinterestedness. We shall give a few examples of it. There lived in Venice an Armenian bishop named Sarkis Sarafian, who often came to see the Abbot, showed great respect to the Servant of God and took a great interest in all the affairs of the Community. This bishop, who was very anxious to have a great name, believed that the cause of Mechitar's great reputation was above all the publication of books, so he began to do the same. He procured the same peculiar type and wood-cuts as the Abbot had used in his edition of the Psalms. The Armenians of Venice were scandalized at this illegal, indelicate action, hurtful, too, to the Congregation, and let the bishop know it. Then his Lordship wrote two lines to Mechitar, saying, 'Father Abbot, if you permit me, I shall print the Psalms; if not, your will be done'. The Servant of God answered, 'If you wish to print them, you may do so, though it harms us; and much more does it harm you, for you will be criticised by everyone and your reputation will suffer'. Nevertheless the bishop printed and published the Psalms as in Mechitar's edition. All the fathers of the Congregation and Mechitar's disciples were grieved at such audacity and asked the Abbot to interdict their publication by appealing to the authorities, who were so obliging to him that one word from him would have sufficed. Instead of that he reprimanded them for being so wanting in charity and trust in the Lord.

5. He was particularly watchful lest the passion of self-interest should get hold of his disciples, even if it were under colour of interest in the Community. A rich young Armenian came to St. Lazarus and begged of the Abbot to be allowed enter. Mechitar addressed to him the words of our Divine Master, 'Go, sell what thou hast and give to the poor and come follow Me'. The young man was surprised because he had heard of the great poverty of the Congregation, and he said, 'Father, why not keep the money for our needs?'. 'My Son', replied the Servant of God, 'I have put my hopes in God Alone, Who can preserve and nourish our Community and free it from all anxiety. When Mechitar saw that the young postulant would not give up his riches, he did not receive him, though he asked repeatedly. Such cases were not rare and Mechitar always refused admittance to those who wished to enter with their fortune. He believed poverty to be the soul of the Congregation and riches its ruin. Then he wrote to his missionaries that he wanted 'equality, that is, poverty' in the reception of candidates, otherwise pride, vanity and envy would creep in. He even wrote to Father Paul, 17th Nov. 1725, 'In a choice between a rich person and a poor person, preference is to be given to the poor, One of his missionaries, F. Thomas, approved of the desire expressed by the parents of one of the young clerics of the Congregation of making a rich vestment for him for Mass, but the Abbot wrote him a severe reproof 24th September, 1736, saying that rich vestment would have elated the young Levite and mortified his companions.

6. His great love for poverty naturally inspired him with a great love for the poor, who gathered from every part of the estuary to the gates of St. Lazarus. This affection of his for the poor was a kind of respect towards the representatives of Jesus Christ. Never did a beggar turn away with empty hands. If Mechitar had to go to town on business, his first recommendation was to pay attention to the poor at the gate; while in the city he gave

alms to whosoever asked him, and so before setting out he took care to provide himself. When he arrived in the city or was leaving it, when the poor knew him to be at the gate of the island, there was a veritable procession two-deep, and everyone had to get his helping. When he was going for a stay in the country he urged all to take care of the poor; when he returned he asked an account of his poor, and was happy to hear that numbers of them came from all sides, especially the poor fishermen, who went back to their cabins or boats, blessing the Servant of God. Many of these fishermen did not sleep at home. All the week long they wandered through the mud of the lagoon in search of fish; at night they ate the bread they got at St. Lazarus, or cooked a little maize (*polenta*) and then went to sleep on a mat in the corner of their miserable boat. On Saturday they returned home, bringing with them the fruit of their week's fishing, consisting of a few pounds of maize, a little oil and other things of strict necessity. The lay-brother at the door was severely enjoined to let no one wait but to give the poor food and alms immediately. Once at dinner-time the brother came to tell the Abbot in an undertone that there was a poor man at the door, but that he could not give him anything for the cellarer was at table and he could not speak to him at meal-time. Mechitar, who had received his portion of food, gave it immediately to the porter to bring to the poor man lest he should have to wait. He himself ate dry bread and was content. During a hurricane or squall on the lagoon the island of St. Lazarus was a sure harbour for the poor fishermen, who not only came to the refuge in the little gulf in front of the gate, (which was there until a year ago) but received also their modest supper. Hence it was that grateful people have come now for two centuries in all their sufferings and afflictions to Mechitar's tomb and sought the intercession of one who in his life loved them and helped them so much.

7. The Angelic St. Thomas when assigning the

nature of the theological virtues, after saying that they have God Alone for their object and that only by infusion do they enter the soul, adds that they can be known only by revelation. Still there are certain exterior acts which do not escape observation and which in their greatness recall, as effect cause, a great principle. It is for this reason that the minute and conscientious study of the life of the Servant of God, Mechitar, obliges us to acknowledge in him the heavenly adornment of these virtues, because, in brief, his whole being was for the greater glory of God Who is 'glorious in his saints', and for the good of souls, for whose instruction and salvation God wonderfully provides.

From the dawn to the sunset of his life on earth Mechitar had the quick, simple faith of a child. Both in public and in private he professed, propagated and defended this faith with the courageous zeal of the Apostles and the intrepidity of the martyrs. His creed was that of the Church of Rome. The land of his childhood, his living interest in knowledge and in sounding the depths, the better to admire and venerate them, of the great truths which unite the creature to the Creator, and manifest His nature and absolute and relative attributes, — the scenes of his apostolate, especially in the East — his illuminating and convincing preaching, which fascinated like the cry of a soul full of God calling all generations to know Him and adore Him — his vigilant care of his missionaries sent forth to the regeneration and spiritual conquest of his beloved Armenia — the trust placed in him by Pope and Cardinals for the solution of delicate problems of dogma and discipline — the turning to him for light of eminent personalities — his extreme care for the thorough and complete education of his sons — his numerous writings on spiritual subjects and his sacred verse, monuments that speak to us of what he believed and desired — the very artistic interest in honouring with temples the hidden God — the fierce, varied and incessant persecutions of the enemies of the Catholic truths, even when with sacrilegious simulation they

presented themselves as defenders of the truth, persecutions which are the most eloquent testimony and the most beautiful eulogy of his heroic faith — this harmonious mass of facts with which Mechitar's life is woven, is a guarantee of what we assert and dispenses us from describing more minutely this heavenly virtue by which man confiding in God's revealed word which is truth and light, believes everything and wishes all humanity to participate in his creed. In the troubled course of his life there never came a doubt to harass his mind. In his soul as in a limpid, peaceful, oriental lake there shone sweetly and quietly the light of the unveiled eternal truths. All who had the good fortune to see him pray and weep, especially during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and at the Elevation of the Sacred Host when he would fix his eyes on his Sacramental Jesus, unanimously affirmed that in the pupil of his kind, yet alert eye there sparkled the light of the supernatural verities, the certainty of the sacred mysteries, the tranquil and harmonious possession of the truths most sacred to the human mind, without the shadow of those doubts which often harass the ill-disposed and perhaps make the studious tremble. In Mechitar the faith soared above all human considerations with a sublime serenity and a heavenly peace.

We read in his 'Life' that an Armenian bishop, residing in Venice, came to see him for some light on the Holy Mysteries. The Servant of God answered him clearly, but he was not satisfied. Then Mechitar quoted several passages from St. Thomas in support of what he said. When he saw that the bishop still hesitated, he knew it was useless to continue; so he cut short the discussion with the Apostle's words, 'Let us subject our mind to the obedience of the Gospel of Christ', and he said not another word.

One day he asked a novice what virtue was the foundation of all the others. When the boy could not answer, he said, 'It is faith. On it all other virtues are raised and without this foundation no virtue can stand'.

8. The Servant of God's hope was similar to his faith. St. Paul speaking of faith, especially in the epistle to the Hebrews (ch. XI, v. I.) cannot distinguish it from hope, and defines it, 'the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not', in as much as it makes present to us the wonders of the future towards which we tend with hope, and convinces us of mysterious things, explaining by means of them the office which conscience exercises in convincing us of natural truths.

The Servant of God possessed the virtue of hope in the highest degree and then communicated it to others by word of mouth, by writing and example. Passing in review the principal episodes of his life related in the earlier portion of this work, from his flight as a child to a solitary spot where he hoped to live like St. Anthony the Abbot, receiving his bread from a messenger of heaven, to the conception and actualization of his gigantic design, before which his heart never quailed, either through want of means or through the difficulties and dangers of all kinds which satanic envy raised against him, and which God permitted to try him like Job; from the great trust he had in divine Providence which enabled him to renounce, abandon and despise earthly goods to such an extent as to deny admittance to his Congregation to those young men who offered huge sums as a help, to his admirable calmness in pain, misfortune and contradictions which he suffered (and made others suffer) with joy, remembering the Apostle's words, 'The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us'; from his child-like certainty of obtaining everything from heaven to his fervent impetus towards the Greatest Good, Which alone shone before the eyes of his soul and obscured and hid all created things in oblivion, we

find that in the Servant of God were verified the words of the Psalmist, 'My eyes are ever towards Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the snare'.

From his life I could cite many examples of his unlimited hope in God in all things. Here is one of them. On one occasion when he was in need of money for his Community, a rich gentleman of Venice came to hear of it and asked him if he would accept an offering of six thousand francs. Mechitar said, 'No'. Then he was asked if he would take one thousand. 'Yes', he answered, 'for at present I am in need of a thousand francs only'. He was fully confident that God would not abandon him; so he did not trouble to keep the rest of the money for the future. Following our Lord's injunctions he thought of the need of to-day and hoping in God he left to Him the care of to-morrow.

9. And what shall we say of his charity, of this queen of virtues, which gives the other two a sort of extrinsic form, by means of which the acts of faith and hope are salutary and meritorious, since it is the bond of union, on earth imperfect but perfect in heaven, of the lover with the beloved? At 'the consummation of the world' at the lightning-flash which announces eternity, the veil will fall from the eyes of faith and there where one sees God 'face to face'¹, faith will be no more; when the anchor is broken, hope will cease in the possession of the beloved object; only charity will remain — eternal like God: 'Charity never falleth away'². If one takes away charity, and charity in the highest degree, the life of the Servant of God is inexplicable, for charity alone could animate and inform that uninterrupted series of holy and heroic acts which we have hitherto witnessed and admired. To avoid useless repetition, let us sum up everything

1. Psalm XXIV. V. 15.

2. Matthew, ch. VI, V. 34.

3. Cor, ch. 13, V. 12.

4. Cor, ch. 13, V. 8.

briefly thus. The supernatural beauty of the Supreme Being, made known through a heroic faith, rapt in an extatic love him, not for a day nor for an hour — as happens in created beauty, which is but a ray participating in the splendour of the First Beauty — but for eternity with its everlasting enchantment. Hence his scrupulous study to please God Alone, to keep his love for Him in a vase of holy purity, which no profane shadow ever sullied, to follow in all things the Divine will made known by revelation and divulged by the Church, to pour forth his heart in seraphic colloquies and prayers day and night and to desire continually to give ever better proofs of this love of his towards God, by propagating His religion and preaching and defending His glory at the cost of his life's blood, which if he could not shed from his veins he shed from his eyes with tears — the blood of the heart, as St. Augustine says. Continual meditation on the proofs of love which God had given man from creation to redemption, a love consummated by the passion and death of His Only-begotten son, prolonged in the Church, which prepares the way to the heavenly Jerusalem by means of the Sacraments, the supernatural instrument of grace flowing from the lacerated breast of the 'Beloved Son', the sublime folly of God's love for man whom He created, of man's love for God and man's love for man coming from his love for God, raising up martyrs, apostles and virgins in every age — all this moved him deeply made hot tears well up in his eyes, made him fetch many an ardent sigh and spurred him on to work mightily for the sole purpose of bringing new lovers to the Great Love, the Infinite Love which cannot be equalled or absorbed by the finite number of the lovers, and to clear the way for the loving embrace of souls with their First Beginning and Last End.

Thus speak his prayers, his mortifications, his abstinences. his fasts, his scourgings, his hair-shirt, his studies, his preaching, his teaching, his foundation and government of the Congregation — thus speak his life and his wonderful death.

CHAPTER XXI.

Illness and Death; Favours and Miracles.

1. The Servant of God's life of privation. — 2. Illness. — 3. His *Will* or *Preparation for Death*. — 4. His malady becomes worse. — His profession of faith. — 5. Good Friday. — 6. His prayers to Jesus and Mary. — His dispositions. — His farewell to his disciples. — 7. His mind fixed on his Lord. — His agony. — His flight to heaven. — 8. His sons' grief. — The funeral. — 9. Election of the Vicar Capitular. — 10. Condolences from all parts of East and West. — 11. The new tomb. — 12. Continuous pilgrimages for 164 Years. — Favours received and miracles worked.

1. A life which from childhood had been dedicated to arduous work, spiritual, intellectual and physical, a life of incessant distractions and anxieties, without any human remedies or helps, was kept vigorous by a special grace of the Lord, that the holy work he had undertaken might be accomplished. The Servant of God would not hear of natural weariness brought on with the weight of years, of the exhaustion of strength, or the fear of the return of former complaints, but his features betrayed him to his sons, who earnestly besought him to rest from his labours, to relax the austerity and rigidity of his life and to listen to their appeals. He only answered them with a meek glance. He was born, he grew up and he lived all his life with those sentiments of an austere anchorite which he had inherited in Sebaste at the house of the two virgins and from the example of the two anchorite brothers.

2. In the year 1746, when he had reached the ripe age of seventy, he was seized in the month of May with an acute attack of jaundice accompanied by a most severe liver-colic, which reduced him to a dangerous and desperate condition. For a month he could take no other food than a little beef-tea, and even then he had to be pressed to drink it by his disciples. It is really impossible to describe the desolation of his children in this juncture. For three days the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in the church and all day long fervent and tearful prayers were offered up for the cure of their beloved father. In the midst of such excruciating torments he never complained, never sighed, but tried his best to remain calm and resigned. He found his greatest consolation in Holy Communion and the recital of the Rosary. He had his office and other prayers and meditations read for him and he recommended himself calmly and joyfully to Jesus and his Most Holy Mother. Often during the day, in moments of torturing colic, he had read to him that inspired prayer of the *Imitation of Christ*, 'Lord, let it suffice that my will be powerfully directed to Thee. Do with me as it pleases Thee. If thou wishest to console me, be Thou praised. If thou wishest me to suffer, be Thou equally praised'.

3. At the end of forty days the pain was alleviated and he could rise from bed and say Mass. But the malady was chronic and so came back to torment him at intervals. During those few days or hours in which he felt a little better he busied himself with the affairs of the community or took counsel with the elder fathers. But he felt within himself the gravity of his illness, and though he dragged on his life for three years more, he never deceived himself, but kept always prepared for death. In this year, during the periods of truce which his ailment accorded him, he even translated from Latin into Armenian, and wrote with his own hand that divinely sublime 'Will, or Preparation for Death' of the great Cistercian, Cardinal Bona, for whose person and works Mechitar had

an unbounded admiration, and whose 'Principles of the Christian Life' he had translated and printed. Mechitar, while reading that 'Will' felt within himself all that that great yet humble monk had felt while writing it. He assimilated and converted those sentiments, as it were, into his own blood, as he says near the end. During his illness he read or had read to him some portion of that sublime and emotional treatise and prayed with that grand, inspired Cistercian that the merciful God would not look on him nor his sins. 'Do not look, O Lord, on my sins, but gaze on the face of Thy Son, who was suspended from the cross for my sins. I offer to Thee, O Lord, His merits. They are my hope, in them have I put my trust.... Oh! How happy should I feel if I had never sinned! How happy if I had passed all my life in good works, fulfilling in all things the will of God! Happy if I could recall the past and begin a new life! How I should do anything to flee from sin and ever keep my innocence!'

Then he proceeded to repeat with the humble soul of Cardinal Bona: Though I have made my general confession several times very minutely, nevertheless, did it please God, I should be ready to make it before everyone, in the street, in the public square, that all might know that I am not what they believe me to be, but a sinner worthy of every kind of punishment and contempt. Along with his venerable exemplar, Mechitar accepted 'death joyfully, when or where it pleased God, submitting to the most tedious and loathsome maladies, wishing to suffer and be tortured, and offering his all to the Lord on account of (his) sins'. Then he was rapt in extasy, and in the words of the same holy cenobite he had recourse to Jesus and His merciful heart, and to the Mother of mercy, the Queen of heaven, the Refuge of sinners and Comfortress of the afflicted, saying in the words of a child clinging to its mother, 'Show thyself a Mother, and intercede for me with thy Son in this last trial on which eternity depends. He had recourse to the archangel

Michael, to his guardian-angel, to the Saints, to St. Gregory the Illuminator, to St. Anthony the Abbot and to St. Benedict, asking their pardon if he ever 'failed in the observance of their rules' and imploring their intercession.

As head of a religious community he possessed nothing in private, and so repeated the words of his immortal exemplar. 'I have no temporal goods to dispose of, for I am a poor and naked monk. The books, furniture and clothing to be seen here belong to the community, which gave me them for my use. I pray my brethren to clothe me when I am dead, in old, torn garments. Let my body, wrapped in them, return to its parent dust, until I rise again when the Lord comes on the last day.' Finally Mechitar speaks to the brethren who are still to remain on earth and, like the cardinal, admonishes them to remember his death and judgment before God, 'It will one day be thus with you also. Death is the same for all, and happy he who every day of his life lives as if it were his last, who dies every day, and every day goes down alive into hell that he may not go down after death, who disposes everything according to the will of the Lord that he may be ready to die any moment.'

This Will of the great son of St. Bernard, which the Servant of God adapted in certain points to his own person, he placed under his pillow. It was his great treasure, and he was consoled and rejoiced in spirit with its frequent reading. And what soul would not exult at those sublime, inspired and spontaneous sentiments? What heart, on reading them, would not think of its falls and bewail the sins of its life?

4. In the year 1749, in the last days of March, he was assailed with his customary jaundice with such vehemence and excess that the doctors who were called to his bedside, declared the illness incurable and gave warning of his approaching end. When this news got abroad, the monks wept bitterly and with tears and sobs prayed to the Virgin-Mother. Mechitar himself, meek and resigned, con-

soled them, bade them conform to the will of God, and prepared by prayer to present himself before the Great Judge.

Meanwhile he calmly and wisely arranged and regulated all, lest in his absence the new Community come to harm. He called near him his venerable secretary, F. Matthew, gave him instructions concerning his burial, and dictated rules for the election of the Vicar-Capitular and also of the Abbot-General, whom he recommended to be elected for life. He added several exhortations on piety, humility and fraternal charity in order to avoid any unpleasant incident in the election. Finally to his Will he added his profession of faith and the following declaration:

‘I confess all that the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church accepts and confesses, and I reject all that she rejects; and since *all my life long* I believed myself bound to obey the Holy Father of Rome as the Vicar of Christ, so also I wish to do at the hour of my death. What is more, if, on my death, there are found things written or spoken by me which are not consonant with the decrees of the See of Rome, I pray that they be considered as never having been said by me. I retract them and submit them with all my heart to the correction of Holy Church.

In life and death I accept no one as my defender—no matter how friendly he is to me—who first of all is not a defender of the decrees of the Holy See of Rome, is not acceptable to the Holy Pope and is not a friend of Catholic truth and faith.

In the second place I wish that the truths of the Catholic Church of Rome be spread throughout my country, and, as long as I live, this I shall unhesitatingly do according to my strength. On my death I leave this wish of mine, as my own heritage, to all my disciples and successors, with the command that they too, as long as they live, shall work for the diffusion of the Catholic faith, paying no heed to the persecutions they may encounter

from the enemies of the true faith and from those who possess it; and that at their death, they shall transmit this my heritage to their successors with the same injunctions.

‘Then prostrate at the feet of the Holy Pontiff and all the Cardinals, I pray and beseech the Holy Roman Church not to despair through the rebellion of my country, but continue its accustomed diligence in illuminating it with the light of the Catholic faith.’

When he had thus finished the whole will, which was known only to F. Matthew, his secretary, he put it under his pillow and continued his prayers.

He passed the whole of Holy Week in dreadful agony. On the 4th of April, which was Good Friday, it was arranged that the ritual procession of the Blessed Sacrament should pass through the corridor where the Abbot’s room was, and his door was left open that that he might receive the blessing of his Divine Saviour under the sacred species. But at that moment he was seized with such a violent coughing with tremendous palpitations of the heart and choking that it was believed his last hour was come. However he recovered and exclaimed with a loud voice, ‘O my sweet and amiable Jesus, look on my afflicted person and have pity on me’. His pain ceased on the spot and from his bed he could adore his amiable Jesus and say aloud in the presence of all, the following inspired and touching prayer, ‘Jesus Christ, Glorious King, Son of God, Thou, on this very day, in commending Thy spirit into the hands of Thy Eternal Father. didst put an end to all the sufferings Thou didst endure for me from Thy cradle onwards. I pray Thee, if it so please Thee, to permit me to commend my soul into Thy hands, in order to end these sufferings. But if Thou dost not wish it, I shall drink this chalice with love, provided Thy will be done. I beseech Thee, give me Thy holy blessing and strengthen me, a miserable creature, that I may be patient in my troubles. Bless my Congregation and guard it in Thy love and in Thy grace.

Grant peace to it and direct it according to Thy holy will..... Preserve the monks from the snares of the devil, that, remaining constant in their vows to Thee, they may live holily and obtain the glory of Thy kingdom'.

After reciting this prayer, he had a heavenly relief and a quiet sleep¹.

6. In the days which followed, his pains came and went. He made his confession again, received Holy Communion and felt strengthened. He bade the fathers rejoice at his sufferings and bless the Lord, for thus it was that His holy will was being done. To those round about who were encouraging him and saying that he was better, he answered that death had no fears for him, yea rather, he wished to be dissolved from the body, be free from the senses and depart from this life to see Jesus Christ in His immense glory, and the Blessed Virgin, the Protectress of his Congregation. 'From this moment I bid farewell to all sensible things, and I do not wish to think any more of matters which will draw me away from my meditations on heavenly subjects; when you see me about to die, do not speak to me, do not distract me, for, by the grace of God, I have matter for meditation; and you, be not afflicted.' Then he added, 'When I am dead, lower this body, worn out by so much suffering, into the grave already prepared for it, and put on my breast the indulgenced crucifix and blessed medal, given me by the Supreme Pontiff'. Someone remarked that the grave was not becoming enough. 'It is too becoming for me', he answered.

On the 9th of April, on the doctor's ascertaining a great weakness of the heart, the Servant of God wished Extreme Unction, which he received with great joy, saying, 'To-day is a solemn day for me'.

1. *Annals of the Mechitarian Congregation*. 1749. Archb. Stephen Akonz, '*Life of Abbot Mechitar*'. ch. XXVI, p. 272.

Then he called the senior members of the Community, encouraged them, instructed them as to what they had to do after his death, blessed them all and bade them his last farewell. Each kissed his hand and wept sorrowfully. Feeling himself growing weaker, he then summoned all the other monks, spoke to them of the love of God, of piety, charity, humility and obedience; then he blessed them all and dismissed them. However he had still a few days of comparative relief.



Mechitar in Council with the elder fathers.

On the 25th of April, after Holy Communion, he took in his hand the cross which he received as a present from Pope Clement XI, spoke lovingly to the holy relic and recommended to it his soul. He had brought to him the picture drawn to the likeness of Our Lady of Sevan and spoke to the Blessed Virgin like an affectionate son, 'O Mother of my Lord, do not abandon me. Intercede for me with Thine only Son, that I may be free from the snares of the enemy'. Then placing the cross and the picture on his breast, he repeated unceasingly, 'Jesus and Mary, I give You my heart and my soul'. Then he repeated in a faint voice the acts of faith, hope and charity.

7. On the 26th of April the fatal symptoms were more pronounced and the doctor gave warning that that night would be the last. In the evening the monks, his sons, encircling his bed, recited the prayers for the agonizing. He was calm and serene. He tried

to sit up a moment but fell back exhausted. To the fathers around who were weeping for him he recited with joyful resignation the words of the Psalmist: 'In the evening weeping shall have place, and in the morning gladness', (XXIX. 5.) Then all the monks assembled in church and through their sobs recited the rosary and prayers for the occasion. Then they put themselves with a fervent prayer into the hands of their holy Mother and retired to their cells where they prayed the whole night.

The Servant of God, who had a weak, but calm night, could repeat often in the morning, 'Jesus, Mary'. He made a sign to his confessor to give him the final absolution. When he had received it, he kissed his crucifix and medal fervently and then fell into that kind of sleep which betokens the last moments of life in this valley of tears. The confessor understanding this, immediately sent one of the priests to say Mass that God might grant a peaceful passage to his soul, and sent for all the senior priests to assist at the holy and glorious death of their beloved Father and Founder. Scarcely was the Mass finished than the holy soul flew to the embrace of its Creator, after a pilgrimage on this earth of seventy-four years († 27th April, 1749).

8. It impossible to describe in words the emotion and overwhelming grief of the priests, who had run to the door of the room of their beloved father. They all looked on themselves as orphans—especially the younger ones. But the seniors, such as F. Matthew, F. Elias and others, men of sanctity and of great authority, bade them dry their tears, encouraged them to put their confidence in Our Lord and His holy Mother, and then they all directed their steps to the church to celebrate Masses for the repose of the soul of their father.

The features of the Servant of God, which had become pale or rather yellowish after such suffering, assumed, immediately after his death, a rosy clearness, to the great wonder of all, and until his burial they preserved this appearance of heavenly calm.

His mortal remains were transferred from the

narrow cell to an adjoining room where a chapel was erected that day. It was always full of monks and others, kneeling around the corpse and praying or weeping silently. In the evening it was brought to the church and the following morning High Mass was celebrated, and all the other Masses were offered up for Mechitar's blessed soul. Through the pious desire of the Venetian and Armenian population, the body was exposed the whole day and a numberless crowd came to kiss Mechitar's hand. When evening came on, since the guests and the citizens had to leave the island for Venice, the funeral took place in the presence of all the monks and two Armenian bishops, Mgr. Minas Pervazian, former Bishop of Smyrna, a great friend of the deceased, and Bishop Sarkis of Caesarea in Cappadocia. There were also represented in great numbers the Venetian clergy, with the Patriarch's Vicar at their head, and a host of Armenians and Venetians of every rank. This sad throng carried the chaste body in their arms amid the glimmering of hundreds of candles, the smell of incense and the mournful hymns to our Lord and the Blessed Virgin, sung through tearless weeping and suppressed sobs, and lowered it into the bare, simple grave of stone, prepared for him in the church, as was then the custom. His sweet countenance thus disappeared under a covering of ordinary stone¹.

9. The monks, young as well as old, after consigning to mother-earth the body of their beloved father, assembled together, according to rule and the instructions of their departed leader, to elect a Vicar-Capitular in the person of F. Elias, one of the senior priests, a prudent man, of great experience, zealous for the practices of monastic life, and one who had been Mechitar's vicar for many years, as we have seen in the course of this *Life*. He and his council had to see to the affairs of the

1. Annals of the Mech. Cong. N. 505, §. 11.

Community proceeding according to regulations, and make preparations for the election of the new Abbot-General for life.

When this primary business had been gone through, everyone's mind travelled back to the revered father they had lost. On the octave of his death, solemn exequies were performed again in church, and the panegyric was preached by the oft-mentioned F. Matthew, a learned and ascetic monk, with a great reputation for sanctity.

10. Meanwhile, notice of the death of the Servant of God spread far and wide, and letters of condolence began to reach the Congregation and the Vicar-Capitular from all sides. The first came from the clergy, the patriciate and the Armenians of Venice. Then came those from neighbouring cities, from the various Armenian colonies of Italy, from the Latin prelates in Rome and from Armenian bishops and priests residing in the Eternal City. From amongst these the first to write was Bishop Vertanes, on the 10th of May, who testified that the Servant of God 'had in all things as his helper, the Spirit of God', lived 'according to the example of the ancient holy fathers', and 'by his life dispersed the darkness and enlightened the Armenian nation'. Towards the end he added, 'Therefore I propose to make him my advocate with God, that his intercession may move God to make us his fellow-banquetters'.

One of the first letters of condolence from the East — and a very touching one it was — came from Mgr. B. Pauli, Pro-Vicar-Apostolic at Constantinople, the Vicar (his uncle), Mgr Bona, being ill, and on the way to Italy. The Armenian Catholic Patriarch of Cilicia sent a letter, too, expressing his great sorrow. Letters came also from every part of Armenia and from the missions of the Mechitarists, among which the one from Elizabethtopol is undersigned, 'Your most humble spiritual sons, always at your service, Lazarus Chanenz, governor of the city, with twelve sworn notables'.

11. Since many of Mechitar's countrymen began

to come on pilgrimages to his tomb, it was agreed to put it in good condition, even to please the pilgrims. A year after our hero's death, when the high altar was raised with steps and a spacious apse was constructed, his affectionate sons built a tomb before it and brought there the body of their beloved father, which body had remained intact from the day of his death. They closed the tomb with a white-and-blue marble stone, and on it wrote an enthusiastic epitaph in the pompous and poetic style proper to Orientals, in which they sang of his sanctity, his wisdom and the good he rendered his country. It is composed of thirty-one lines of rhymed verse, whose initial letters form the sentence 'Sweet-sounding harp of the Spirit Divine'.

Lyre of the love that Seraphim inflames,
Touched by the fingers of an all-wise God,
A sweet and spiritüal sound gave forth.
A chosen flower from Sebaste's plot.
An Abbot he, whose shining path to us
A mirror was; and still the example lasts.
In body active and erect in stature.
His mind a store-house rich with thought profound.
Of grace an Oriental light, the blind
To tell of Justice' Sun, the Incarnate Word.
Collected here the wisdom of all wise.
Alert and strong, his mind alone imbibed
All truth so that in him it seemed transfused,
And in his very blood did seem to run
That truth which hearts rejoices; hence
Of thousands leader, master he became.
He wrote full many a book and faultlessly
For his beloved Armenïa, whose boast
Delight, salvation, shield he proved to be.
A lamb in meekness, patience, he repulsed
The onsets of the warring fiends of hell.
The Order rose; and hearts and souls to God
He offered as sweet entwined flowers in fair
And golden bouquets. Choirs of monks
He framed who now his glories sing.
A sermon without words, a living light,
He smoothed the rugged earth of souls, and formed
Fair gardens to transplant to heaven—

His daily work from dawn to placid dusk.
 This architect—and workman too—to bind
 With sparkling gold the golden bouquet fair
 Of many flowers entwined, on earth did here erect
 This convent, so majestic and so grand.
 His voice was of a shepherd, prudent, strong,
 A thunderbolt to vice, to weak like thunder,
 A gentle breeze for pure and humble hearts,
 To knaves a hurricane with stroke and lash.
 His race at length was run; o'ercome by death
 He sweetly breathed his last, and thus the light
 Of Hayastan¹ crossed to the immortal shores.

Of festival and altar-honours worthy,
 This golden vase thus offered to the Lord.

12. For a century and a half now, crowds have flocked to this tomb from Venice, from the neighbouring cities, from Chioggia and from all the islands of the lagoon. These continual pilgrimages testify to the authenticity of the graces received through the intercession of the Servant of God. They are attested chiefly by invalids, many of whom are brought in litters or in arms and go away after eight days on foot, thanking the Servant of God. Of these facts we also, Mechitar's sons, and the ecclesiastic authorities, are witnesses. They happen almost every day of the week, but especially on Wednesday, which is a traditional day among the lower classes.

13. Among the many graces obtained through his intercession, we shall relate but few. Here is one which the third Abbot-General, Mgr. Akonz, Bishop of Siunia, personally saw. He was a man of great learning and had the reputation of a saint. He also wrote a 'Life' of Mechitar and came to St. Lazarus three years after Mechitar's death. He relates that in the time of Abbot Melconian his predecessor, a young boy, twelve years old, of a

1. See Appendix II.

noble Venetian family, was grievously ill and was given up by the doctors, who declared his recovery impossible. Then a rich Armenian gentleman, named Christof Tchugahezi, who was acquainted with this noble family, came to the sick boy's home and gave him a picture of the Servant of God, saying, 'Have recourse with faith to the efficacious intercession of this holy man who is buried at St. Lazarus'. The parents fervently invoked the intercession of Abbot Mechitar, and in the evening put the picture beside the invalid then in his agony. But lo! in the morning, by the grace of God, they found the lad completely cured, so much so that he left his bed, to the great wonder of those who saw him and knew the former state of his health — and especially of the doctors. The following day the boy was brought by his parents to the monastery of St. Lazarus and kissed Mechitar's tomb. They had a Mass celebrated to glorify God, who, through the intercession of his Servant had worked such a miracle, and then returned to Venice¹.

Mrs. Augusta Craven, a celebrated French authoress, in a work entitled, '*La soeur Natalie Narschin*', relates how her mother was so seriously ill that the doctor who had been attending her stopped all medicines and remedies as useless, and said there was really no hope. It was even thought too late to pray for a miraculous cure, so far had the ailment progressed. One day, while staying at Venice, a gondola stopped under her room and she was asked to come down. She went and there, to her great surprise and joy, she saw her mother, cured by a miracle at Mechitar's tomb, whither she had had herself brought.

How many other miracles could I relate, some of which have taken place in these last few years or even months! But the delicate duty of Postulator imposes on me an equally delicate silence, for many

1. 183-185. Ed. Paris. Perrin & Co.

of them have been quoted in the preparatory Process completed in the year 1902, at Venice, under the auspices of His Eminence, the Cardinal Patriarch Joseph Sarto, later Pope Pius X.

All the desires and prayers of our Congregation were directed to the Lord that his Holiness might long be spared among us, and that he, who, as Cardinal, had shown such interest in the Process for the Introduction of the Cause of Beatification, and had ever been such a warm friend to us all, might, as the Vicar of Christ, declare to all Christendom that *Abbot Mechitar is Blessed*.



But God had disposed matters otherwise. He called to Himself this good and Holy Pontiff, to reward him in eternity. However, the Mechitarian Community had great reason to rejoice on hearing this same determination of beatifying the Servant of God pronounced by Pius's successor in the Sovereign Pontificate:

HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XV.



The Madonna protecting the island of the
Mechitarist Fathers.



APPENDIX I.

The Cause of the Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God.

Ordinary Process.

For a century and a half all those who have known the life of the Servant of God, Abbot Mechitar of Sebaste, in their enthusiasm and edification have expressed the wonder that his Congregation did not take the necessary steps at an opportune moment to have their Founder raised to the honours of the altar.

In truth, who amongst his sons would not burn with the greatest zeal to see their Father as soon as possible honoured by Holy Church with the decree of Beatification? But the insurmountable difficulty was for a long time the squallid poverty of his Congregation. Hence it was impossible to keep a person at Rome for this purpose and meet the expenses necessary for a Process, which is relatively long and costly, considering the gravity of the matter. The poverty reached such a depth at the beginning of the 19th century that there was not enough to enable them to live even miserably. The Abbot General, Archbishop Stephen Akonz, finally could not hide the fact, and it was the generosity of a rich Armenian in the Indies, Mr. Alexander Kharamian, that provided opportune help and brightened up and encouraged everyone. This benefactor hearing of the Community's wish to have a house in Rome

to cope with their various needs, bought in the year 1816, a house at *Capo le Case*, contiguous to the church of St. Joseph, which was officiated by the Discalced Carmelite Nuns, and this he presented to the Abbot General.

Then the Congregation sent to Rome as Procurator-general F. Ignatius Papazian, who after settling down in Rome, took counsel with several



F. Baptist Aucher, Mechitarist,
Vicar general of the Congregation.

lawyers, and particularly with the learned advocate Hyacinth Amici on the possibility of the introduction of the Cause. The advocate presented twelve questions to him and asked for the respective answers. F. Papazian forwarded the questions to the

Vicar-general of the Congregation, at St. Lazarus, F. Baptist Aucher, a profound theologian, author of many theological works and a most erudite martyrology in twelve volumes, a man of great learning, authority and sanctity, as we mentioned in our Introduction.

F. Aucher answered the twelve questions of F. Papazian on the 3rd of June 1827. I think it worth while transcribing these answers to show more clearly the great esteem in which the Servant of God was held, and the reason of delaying the Process before the S. C. of Rites.

Rev. Father and dear brother,

I think your state a happy one, for you can think of and execute many good things. Perhaps I also shall be happy because you wish me to participate in this good, as I should do.

Your proposal is commendable and approved by all but its execution is delayed, there being no hope from any quarter of the expenses being paid. Not only are there not five thousand francs. Why! there are not five hundred. I hope you will believe me. Perhaps it would hardly be believed. We are frustrated in many of our wishes, but putting our trust in God, I say: Though you know that my occupations are far above my powers, nevertheless if in any way I can be of a little help to you in this matter, without any hesitation I should set about hunting up old documents to strengthen more and more the proofs in favour of that Venerable Personage. Meanwhile I am procuring material for your Reverence, am answering one by one the answers of the advocate, and you also can add more details to them from the traditions you have heard from our old priests, which we can authenticate by the testimony of the whole Congregation.

Here are the answers:

I. Q. *Whether there were any ocular witnesses, or confessors, and whether they were at Venice?*

A. Our venerable Father in his wanderings (in

Armenia) confessed to learned Latin religious of any Order, but particularly to the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, from whom he also received letters of recommendation and praise. After founding his monastery at Modon and Venice, he confessed to some of the elder fathers, amongst whom is worthy of mention, his secretary, F. Matthew of Eudocia, who first wrote his *Life*, the original of which is preserved in the Archives of our monastery. There are living at present two fathers, F. Avedichian and F. Luke Ogluc, who have repeatedly heard him praised by his confessors, especially by the said F. Matthew.

II. Q. *Whether these confessors testify to his baptismal innocence?*

A. Many of our monks heard from these confessors and relate that the Servant of God lived from his infancy with all the signs of having preserved his baptismal innocence. However it is not the custom in the East to authenticate such things in writing or draw them up publicly. Many of us monks have seen his first disciples and his immediate successor, and we have heard from them of the stainless life of our Father in his infancy and, with the unction of the Holy Ghost, throughout his whole life.

III. Q. *What was his daily private life?*

A. His life according to ocular witnesses consisted of three labours: 1st, Prayer, meditation, care of his soul, particular devotion to the most Blessed Virgin; 2nd, composition of spiritual exercises for his monks or for seculars, partial or complete commentaries on Holy Scripture; other works of confutation for the conversion of the schismatics to the bosom of the Roman Church, and the recalling of sinners to penance, as all his printed or unedited writings bear witness; 3rd, personal instruction of his own people and of foreigners to piety and studies profitable to soul and mind. Hence he travelled throughout the world preaching and teaching to all the way of salvation.

IV. Q. *Did he celebrate every day and attend to meditation?*

A. He celebrated Mass every day, unless he was ill. He was assiduous and unfailing at the Community meditations, besides his own private ones, as also at spiritual reading, an occupation dear to him from childhood. From his words and actions all knew the piety of that soul zealous for the glory of God and the exaltation of Holy Church.

V. Q. *Whether besides the vision he had of the Blessed Virgin, he had other gifts — of prophecy, reading of hearts and extasies.*

A. Without ostentation he knew the interior of some hearts, foresaw many things with his acute mind and internal illumination, particularly as regards his Community. From the monks' way of acting he knew if their intentions were honest or not, reading the depths of their hearts, so much so that when the events were realized everyone wondered, remembering that he had foretold them. The misfortunes are already known of the incorrigible Manasses and Dionysius, and above all of that F. George of Anteb, whose expulsion from the Community he learned in a dream. About the latter also everything was verified as he predicted. Moreover in all his anxieties or in the troubles of the Community, he would withdraw to his room, prostrate himself on the ground, and bellowing like a lion, break out into the following words, 'Mother of God, Mother of mercy, thou art my refuge'. (This was often heard by the lay-brother Nicholas of Brussa who occupied the next room to assist him, and who related it to us). Then immersed in a profound silence he would rise happy and joyful and calmly proceed with his usual tasks.

VI. Q. *Whether during life he had a public reputation for sancility among the people and the higher classes; and what proofs there are of it?*

A. A good reputation he left behind him, wherever he went. In Venice, and in the various letters which were sent to him and his successor from divers countries, it is apparent that everyone looked on him as a man of God, a living saint, full of the Holy Ghost. We also knew in the city of Venice

many old persons of all classes, rich and poor, who mentioned his name with respect and honoured him with the epithet of 'Saint'. In the East even to-day ecclesiastics and seculars relate many things about him which they heard from their parents and grandparents: how Mechitar was from infancy a wonderful person (a saint) who, preaching the Word of God, introduced Catholicism into many places; how as a young boy with a stick in his hand he used to preach to the shepherds and the labourers in the fields with a burning heart and exhort them to the service of God. Such stories I heard myself in Ancyra fifty-three years ago.

VII. Q. *Whether he was acclaimed a Saint at his death?*

A. His death was a great calamity to the whole of Venice, because the people felt themselves bereft of so holy a man, and for two or three days many flocked to St. Lazarus, both great and small, to rest their eyes on the venerated corpse, and kiss the right hand. Italians came and so did his fellow-countrymen who were then in great numbers in Venice. There came also two Armenian bishops along with many priests, who all knew of his sanctity, and in presence of all F. Matthew made the funeral oration in a way suitable to the holy defunct person. This oration is preserved in our archives.

VIII. Q. *Had he a reputation for sanctity after death? Did the faithful wish to have relics of him? Did they go to his grave to obtain graces from God?*

A. Many of his countrymen and citizens of Venice came on pilgrimages to his tomb and asked with devotion for articles used by him. Even to-day in the East people ask us for a portion of his dress or something else. This with great difficulty do we grant, and we give only to grave and pious families. His letters are kept in eastern homes as relics, and at Constantinople where fires are frequent, some of his letters have been preserved. These we collect, if it is possible, lest they be lost. The Mercatenz family at Zante keeps as a sacred souvenir a pic-

ture of our Father, drawn by an Armenian friend of theirs, while Mechitar was still alive.

IX. Q. *Did God work miracles or grant favours at his intercession?*

A. In the last pages of the *Life* written by Mgr. Akonz there is related the cure in Venice of a sick person given up by the doctors. Then Mr. Khatchig exhorted his parents to have recourse to the intercession of the saint, recently dead. The same Mr. Khatchig, who was most devoted to the Servant of God, some years later saw in a dream Abbot Mechitar in his house, and the latter said to him, 'Why are you sleeping, brother? Let us go and bury our brother, Bishop Minas, who died to-day'. When Mr. Khatchig awoke, someone knocked at his door and told him that Bishop Minas had just died. This astonished the gentleman who thus saw his dream realized. We also on various occasions of great difficulty have had recourse to God through the intercession of our Founder and many a time we have obtained the mercy of God for the Community and for particular individuals.

X. Q. *What reason can be adduced for the Process having been delayed from the year 1749, when he died, until the present, which will exclude the suspicion of fraud in having waited until all ocular witnesses were dead?*

A. The reason for delaying until now the process of his beatification or canonization, was eastern shyness together with our poverty. The want of courage is innate in the character of our people who have no high esteem of themselves and do not dare to present to Europe their country and their members. Therefore since the beginning of this century our ancestors had not the courage to publish the antiquity of our nation's history, books of our old writers, or translations of Greek works preserved among the Armenians. Then again the monastic humility of our Venerable Fathers prevented them, in their anxiety to hide their virtues, from publishing those of their Founder, because they participated in his pious work — the enlighten-

ment of their country and the exaltation of the faith. In the third place we had not a sufficient knowledge of western languages, with some exceptions, and so we do not publish books in Italian or Latin, etc, but only in Armenian for the betterment of our country. Finally, we had not a house of our own at Rome before 1816 and we dared not undertake such a great work by means of correspondence. Scarcely did we procure a house in Rome than we translated the *Life* of our Founder from Armenian into Latin and from Latin into Italian. Our poverty is evident, lasts even now, and our Community was never wealthy enough for such an undertaking. To day our first and last difficulty is our poverty. And how set on foot a cause for which there will be so many expenses which will be paid neither by us nor by our harassed people? Then we are not very well known to Europeans for princes and sovereigns to help us.

Through this same poverty of our nation the cause of the holy priest of God, Ter Comitas, martyred for the faith at Constantinople by the Turks in 1707 through the instigation of the schismatics, whose sanctity has been confirmed by miracles and the testimony of all nations, could not be brought forward at Rome for the purposes of beatification. Though in our days many have written about him, obtaining his authentic 'martyrology' from us and sending it to Rome, still no one has had the courage to push on the work, on account of the expense. Similarly for other Saints in the East.

XI. Q. *Whether there are any persons to-day adverse to his reputation for sanctity? Who are they? What are their reasons?*

A. We do not know if there were any Catholics directly adverse to his reputation for sanctity. The schismatics and heretics were, for they hated him for latinizing our nation. The same hatred they bear towards us to-day since we are his disciples. If some of our Catholic brethren, induced by some reason or other showed some opposition, they repented of it afterwards, made amends and published



Hospice of the Mechitarist Fathers in Rome,
at St. Joseph's of Capo le Case (now Via Francesco Crispi).



The Servant of God, Abbot Mechitar.
 Abbot Stephen Melconian. Archbishop Abbot Stephen Akonz.
 Archbishop Abbot Soukias Archbishop Abbot George Somalian. Hurmuz.
 Archb. Abbot Ignatius Ghiurekian.

by voice and in writing that Mechitar was truly a man of God. If some of them accused him at Rome, the Holy See itself exculpated him entirely, as we know from the Archives of Propaganda. Besides, these accusations were not directed against him, but against one or two of his disciples, and even



Mgr. Ignatius Papazian, Mechitarist,
Titular Archb. of Taron, ordaining bishop for
the students of Propaganda.

they came out of the trial innocent. The greatest attempt to taint us was in our own times, when accusations were launched against the Congregation itself and against its members. But all Rome knows how truth and justice won the day, so it is superfluous to say more.

XII. Q. *In what language are his works and writings?*

A. Most of his writings are in literary Armenian, a few in the spoken tongue, and a handful



Mgr. Edward Hurmuz, Mechitarist,
Titular Archb. of Shirag, ordaining-bishop
for the students of Propaganda.

in Turkish. He has some letters too, written, in Italian, to Rome and elsewhere.

For the present enough; greetings, etc.

Your Reverence's humble Servant.

F. Baptist Aucher. Vicar.

This letter was written in 1827 and there passed away seventeen years, during which time the Con-

gregation prepared documents and funds, before the instructory Process commenced. Great encouragement was given by the Venetian Pope Gregory XVI, who from boyhood was an admirer of the life of the Servant of God and later on an intimate friend of his Congregation. So it was decided to begin.

Mgr. Soukias Somal, titular archbishop of Siunia and third Abbot-General of Mechitar's monastery, presented as postulator to the S. C. of Rites, F. Edward Hurmuz, brother of the future Abbot-General and archbishop, Mgr. George, and he was accepted. F. Ignatius Papazian had become by this time Titular Archbishop of Taron and ordaining-bishop at Propaganda for the Armenian students.

But since in the first place an instructory Process had to be instituted at Venice where Abbot Mechitar had lived and died, the Patriarch of Venice, Card. James Monico, native of Riese, Venice, formed his tribunal, and the postulator at Rome delegated in his stead, F. Raphael Trenz, then director of the Armenian Raffaelian College in the city of Venice.

The Congregation wished to commence the Process on the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, the 8th of September, a day sacred in the annals of the Congregation, it being the anniversary of its foundation at Constantinople. So the following day, 9th Sept. 1844, there assembled for the first time in the chapel of the Patriarchal Palace the members of the tribunal, presided over by the Cardinal Patriarch; and after all had taken the oath on the book of the Gospels, they opened the inquiry for 'the Cause of the beatification of Abbot Mechitar of Sebaste, Armenian priest, Founder of the Congregation of the Mechitarist Fathers in Venice'.

The inquiry continued contemporaneously at Rome, where Mgr. Ignatius Papazian was questioned¹. In the investigations at Venice almost all the

1. Mgr. Papazian died at Rome in his 88th year on the 22nd May, 1852, and was buried in the adjacent church

elder priests were called upon, beginning from the Abbot-General, to testify on oath to what they knew of their Founder. Among the documents were inserted letters from distant witnesses among whom must be mentioned the Abbot-General of the Mechitarists at Vienna. Besides that, all the documents which were to serve for the Cause were confronted and authenticated one by one. For these F. Gabriel Aivazowski, the archivist, and F. Leontius Marcar Alishan took the oath as interpreters. All this lengthy examination which came to a close in the last days of August of the year 1847, was sealed by all the members and sent by special courier to the S. C. of Rites.

Meanwhile Pope Gregory XVI died and Pius IX succeeded him on the 5th of June 1846. Still the Process continued the same at Rome until 1848, when there occurred disastrous political events for the city of Rome, which forced the Pope to flee to Gaeta. To these vicissitudes were added the troubles at Venice, where a Republic was proclaimed; and then followed war, seige, famine, cholera and misery. In those circumstances the Congregation used up for itself and its numerous needs all its past, present and even future savings. Thus it found itself in hard straits and impeded from proceeding with the Cause. Financial failures in the East were added to the already heavy losses, and so for a long time one could not think of the matter. In 1885 another attempt was projected, but it was not until 1899 that they had sufficient courage to continue.

The Mechitarian Congregation wished to solemnly celebrate in the year 1901 the bi-centenary of its foundation. The Council, encouraged by its head, Mgr, Ignatius Ghiurekian, titular Archbishop of Trajanopolis, Abbot-General, decided in 1899 to

of St. Joseph at Capo le Case, before the altar of Our Lady, Consoler of the Afflicted. When the pavement was being restored in the church, the tomb-stone was placed on the wall of the sacristy, to the left.

premiss the solemnities with the Cause of the Beati-
fication of the Founder. The Cardinal Patriarch
Joseph Sarto was delighted at this decision and
encouraged the holy work. Some months later the
Abbot betook himself to Rome, where a very grie-
vous illness of several months, duration hindered
him proceeding with the question at once, but on
his recovery he presented to Pope Leo XIII in March
of 1901 the great desire of all to continue the said
Cause. The Pontiff, who on every occasion had
shown his affection towards and his esteem of the
person of Mechitar and his Institute, greatly praised
the Abbot's wish and encouraged him to take up
the work anew. Then the Holy Father nominated
as postulator Mgr. Anthony Savelli Spinola, (Canon
of St. Mary Major's, Domestic prelate of His Holi-
ness and Secretary for Oriental Affairs in the S. C.
of Propaganda) who set himself to the task.

His Eminence Card. Ferrata was nominated Pon-
ens or Relator of the Cause, and theologians were
appointed to revise and examine the writings.

From 1848 to 1901, not only had Mechitar's re-
putation for sanctity not diminished, but it was
confirmed more and more by new documents and
fresh testimonies. From among so many I think the
following cutting to be of great value, which is
taken from the report of Mgr. Ferreri, Archbishop
of Sidon, to Propaganda, after an apostolic visit to
Constantinople.

Mgr. Ferreri, after speaking of the Armenian
Catholic religious communities in the Levant: the
Antonians of Lebanon, founded by Archb. Abraham
of Aleppo, later Peter 1st, Patriarch of Cilicia, the
Mechitarists of Venice, 'from whom sprung the Mech-
itarists of Vienna'; after narrating the whole life
of the young man and the priest Mechitar, whose
courageous spirit could 'enlighten a great number
of persons'.—his flight to Modon and then to St.
Lazarus, Venice, adds these words, 'The number of
monks increased with the security of their position
and then there set out noble missionaries to va-
rious cities of Europe and Asia to the great satis-

faction of this Holy See. To prove this, when Benedict XIV received from F. Mechitar the present of an Armenian Bible, he honourably thanked him... and his monks for their fruitful work in the holy missions. Mechitar passed from this life in 1749. In these Archives there are to be found recorded many great and meritorious works of his, such as to *procure him the honours of the Altar*'.



Cardinale D. Ferrata.

This stupendous testimony echoed the general felling, too, among the Armenian Catholic clergy, and, when occasion required it, the Patriarch and bishops hastened to express their sentiments at the feet of the Pope.

Meanwhile, since many a year had slipped past since the first process, a new inquiry had to be set on foot at Venice to prove the continuation of Abbot Mechitar's reputation for sanctity. His Eminence the Patriarch Joseph Sarto, immediately formed his tribunal under his own presidency as ordinary judge. On the proposal of the Abbot-General, Mgr. Francis

Pantaleo, canon penitentiary, was nominated vice-postulator. All the members took oath before his Eminence, on the 18th of July 1901, and set themselves to the task with holy ardour and devotion. It was completed on the 22nd of July, 1903, two weeks before the exaltation of the beloved Patriarch to the see of St. Peter. When coming to the Conclave, he even brought with him all the documents relating to the new ordinary Process and had them handed in to the S. C. of Rites.

Almost simultaneously the Process of *Non Culto* was held, and it was forwarded to the same Congregation, where it was regularly opened, as was the first.

When the Cause had reached this point, the Postulator, Mgr. Anthony Savelli Spinola, died. In his place F. Minas Nurikhan, Vicar-General of the Mechitarian Congregation, was nominated in his place. There soon arrived from Venice a huge box containing the voluminous writings of the Abbot and they also were consigned to the S. C. of Rites.

Then there began to reach the Holy Father *Postulatory Letters* from all the bishops in the Province of Venice, from many in the north of Italy, and from several Cardinals; from all the Armenian Catholic bishops, with the Patriarch at their head, from every Abbot of the Benedictine Order and from many others.

The examination of the numerous writings, all full of dogmatic and moral questions, was finished in the year 1906 and was brought to the Congregation on 4th Dec. of that year, by the Promotor of the Faith.

On the 9th of December the *Osservatore Romano* officially published the sitting of the S. C. of Rites where was discussed "the question of the writings of the Servant of God, Abbot Mechitar, Founder of the Armenian Missionaries". The objections of the Censor were officially presented to the Postulator in the year 1908. The answers to them, a large volume finished in 1911, has just been printed for presentation to the Congregation.

But before the *Votum* was completed, I began to write the "Life of the Servant of God", obliged by necessity and encouraged by His Holiness, Pius X. It was ready for the press in 1913 and was finished in April of the following year. I immediately presented the work to the Holy Father, who was delighted and had published in the *Osservatore Romano* his pleasure at the appearance of the book. He spoke to me at length of the Servant of God, for he had presided over the First Process at Venice, and said, "How I should like to introduce the Cause of Beatification myself, for afterwards matters would run fast. But it is a long process. Let it be as the Lord wishes". Then he added these words, which I mentioned to several people that very day, "I have never had any doubt as to Mechitar's sanctity. If anyone doubts, let him read that stupendous *Will*".

We lost our beloved father, who was so desirous to see the Servant of God on the altars. But we immediately found the same sentiments in his glorious successor, His Holiness Benedict XV, follower and doublyt he successor of the immortal Benedict XIV, who had such beautiful words for Mechitar and his missionaries¹. Scarcely was he seated on the Pontifical Throne than, in the first audience granted to us Mechitarist Fathers, he hastened to declare the fatherly interest he took in our Cause, and then he added these very words, "I shall be to you as your beloved Pius X".

But painful circumstances compelled us to slow our steps. In the first instance, his Eminence, Cardinal D. Ferrata, Secretary of State and our zealous *Ponens* was taken from our midst after a month of acute suffering. After the customary formalities before the Sacred Congregation of Rites, the office of *Ponens* was eagerly taken up by Cardinal Tecchi, a great jurist and one well versed in the affairs of

1. See above p. 329.

the above-mentioned Congregation, of which he was Pro-Prefect. He immediately wished to read the "Life of the Servant of God", whose praises he had heard since his boyhood, as of a really great personage. He took the book and two days later made



Cardinal Scipio Tecchi.

his way to our humble habitation at *Capo le Case* to thank us most enthusiastically, and said, "I already knew that Mechitar was a great man, but now I know that he is a great *Saint*". He promised to bring the Cause before the Congregation within four months, but in the midst of his numerous occupations for the Church of God a fiery illness cut short his life (1915. Feb. 7).

Then the position of *Ponens* was zealously and lovingly assumed by the Bishop of Albano, Cardinal Januarius Pignatelli, Granito di Belmonte, who by his untiring labours has already prepared the Cause



Cardinal Januarius Granito di Belmonte.

for the next Congregation of the Cardinals. The Holy Father, to hasten matters further, had nominated a Revisor *ad hoc* to obviate innumerable difficulties arising from the fact that the Armenian language in which the Servant of God had written — and in a style rather difficult on account of the times in which he lived — was unknown to Roman Prelates, excepting very few of Armenian nationality.

However, in spite of all these difficulties, since

the Holy See is accustomed to act firmly and slowly in these matters, no one ceases to be confident that the Cause will triumph to the glory of God and the good of His Church.

Rome 31 Dec. 1915.

F. Minas Nurikhan.

APPENDIX II.

For further information concerning the people so often mentioned in this work one may read with profit Fr. Issaverdantz (Mechitarist), *Armenia and the Armenians*. The best book by an English Catholic author is *The Lesser Eastern Churches*, by Dr. Fortescue, where (pp. 382-445) is given an excellent summary of Armenian history, religion and rite.

A few words are necessary here to clear up some points mentioned in the course of this translation.

The word "*Armenian*" is of foreign extraction and seems to have come from the Greeks or the Persians. The Armenians call themselves *Haikh* and their country Hayastan. They claim descent from an ancient hero, named Haik, grandson of Japhet, one of Noah's sons. Hence their name. This to explain the word *Haican* and others which have appeared in the book.

The reader may perhaps have remarked how some of the persons herein mentioned had only one name, e. g. Mechitar, Minas, Avetic, Anania. In those days it was not the custom to have two (or more) names. There was not always a continuous family-name or, if there were, it was not used. One was

content with one's surname; if there were danger of confusion, one added one's fathers name, e. g. Mechitar of Peter or son of Peter. Something similar is to be found to-day in the Highlands of Scotland, where the Gaels, though they all belong to one of the historic clans and so have some classic name, are content to design themselves with the names of their father and grand-father, e. g. Donald son of Ronald son of Ian. The determinative "son of" — in Gaelic, *Mac*, in Armenian-*ian*, *-uni*, etc., — has in time become part of the name and thus most Armenians are now known by the termination of their family-name. Witness many examples throughout this book, e. g. pp. 259, 394.

Proper names and other Armenian titles we observed as having been spelt differently on various occasions. This was not always a printer's mistake. The Armenian language has two pronunciations (and hence spellings) — one eastern or Russian, the other western or Turkish. While the former uses hard sounds like g, d, b, the latter use the corresponding soft ones, k, t, p. Sometimes the letters are mixed, hence we have vartabet, vardapet, vartabed, Anteb Antep. The introduction of double vowels or their change account also for such variants as vartabied, vardapiet, vuartabit and Aintab, Aintep. Finally the impossibility of rendering in some western languages the guttural "ch" (as in the Scotch *loch*) gave rise to a different transliteration in some documents we quoted, e. g. Mechitar, Mekhitar. We judged it better to leave them as we found them.

APPENDIX III.

In this volume a word or two has occasionally been said on some ancient traditions which Armenians cherish exceedingly. It is proposed here to note briefly the historical basis on which they rest.

Their earliest tradition is that in Armenia was the Garden of Eden. Interpreters of Holy Scripture are not absolutely certain where to locate this historic spot, but everyone of them inclines to place it between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates (cf. Cornelius a Lapide in his famous commentary, Crelier, *La Sainte Bible* and many others) and that is just where Armenia lies. It is not then without reason (read the above-mentioned writers for a scientific exposition of the theory) that Armenians cling to this unique privilege.

Next comes their contention that Noah's ark rested on the mountain of Ararat, which lies in the heart of Armenia (see above pp. 48, 52). That this is true there is not the shadow of a doubt. It is expressly mentioned in the original Hebrew Bible (Gen. VIII. 4). It is in the Septuagint — translated from the Hebrew into Greek by Jewish scholars of Alexandria three centuries before Christ. It is to be found in the ancient Coptic version and in the Arabic — both of which are held in the highest estimation by experts. It is in the Armenian translation, than which perhaps no one is more faithful (see above p. 328) or of greater critical value (cf. Fortescue, *Lesser Eastern Churches* p. 394, n. 3.). It is in what is acknowledged to be the best French Catholic edition of the Bible — that of Crampon.

It is also in the Revised and the Authorized English Versions, whose authority from a scientific point of view must be conceded. It is in the German Protestant (or Rationalist) translations too.

Add to this that it has been the constant tradition among Armenians since before the advent of Our Lord, as testify the numerous stories and legends of the district¹. Those versions of the Bible in which Ararat is not mentioned, e. g. the Vulgate and those derived from it, the Douai and the Italian, are not positively against this contention but merely mention in an indefinite way what other editions say more determinately, for they have "the mountains of Armenia,, whereas the rest put "the mountains of Ararat". How, then, can one reasonably call into question this fact, and with what justice could Fortescue write (op. cit. p. 385, n. 1.) that it is a foreign tradition adopted by the Armenians?

Coming now to the Christian era we find the most important and most interesting of all their traditions, viz, their direct intercourse with Christ. The story is told by the greatest of Armenian historians, Moses of Choren A. D. 460, (Hist. Bk. II. Ch. XXXI), "Abgar, King of the city of Edessa, which in the days of Jesus Christ formed part of Lower Armenia, had been suffering from a severe malady for seven years. He came to hear from some ambassadors of his just returned from Palestine, whither they had betaken themselves to renew treaties with the Roman Proconsul, Marinus, that in Jerusalem Christ was working miraculous cures. He thereupon wrote to

1. Mount Ararat is called to-day by the Turks *Arghidagh* (the Ark-Mount) and by the Persians *Koh-i-Nouh* (Noah's Mount).

Our Redeemer a letter which began thus, 'Abgar, son of Arsam, Prince of the earth, to Jesus the Saviour and Benefactor, who hast appeared in the country of Jerusalem, greeting' etc. In this letter King Abgar invited Christ to Edessa that He might cure him and free him from the persecutions of the Jews".

The bearers of the letter meet Our Lord at Jerusalem, as the words of Gospel testify when they relate (John. XII. 20-22) that some pagans came to see Christ. They dare not approach Him when they hear Him speak, so they tell Philip, Philip tells Andrew, and Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. The Saviour did not accept the proffered invitation, but condescended to honour Abgar with a letter. It was written by the Apostle Thomas at Our Lord's dictation and contained a promise on Christ's part to send one of His disciples. According to the story, King Abgar had sent also his talented artist Hanan to paint Our Saviour's portrait, but he could not succeed in representing Our Lord's Countenance on cloth. Seeing this Christ took the canvass and applied it to His face and His likeness was thereupon represented on it.

After Abgar's death his son did not always remain in the Christian faith. Urged on by interested courtiers he set on foot a fiery persecution, and, that nothing might be left, he determined to destroy the letter and the *Sacred Impression*, which was preserved in a niche on the city-gates of Edessa, with a lamp lit before it, as the Protector of the city against all enemies.

The evil design of the king was revealed in a vision to the holy bishop Addai, who went with some faithful at night-time and secretly walled up the niche and the lamp. Thus it remained unthought-

of until the year 545, during the war of the Persian King Cosroe. When he attempted to besiege Edessa, the *Sacred Countenance* was made known to Bishop Eulalius who took it out with the lamp (which tradition says remained always lit). It even bounded on the enemy's part of the battlefield and scattered them all. The emperors at Constantinople did all they could to have the precious relics. Finally Constantine Porphyrogenitus succeed by threats in having the *Sacred Countenance* transferred to Constantinople, 15th Aug. 944, where amid an infinity of gems and golden ornaments it rested in the Imperial chapel.

Then the Emperor John Paleologus, in gratitude to the Genovese Republic for having saved his throne, presented it to the Genovese captain, Leonard Montaldor. He brought it with great veneration to his own country and at first kept it in his private chapel, but in his will bequeathed it to the Armenian Basilians, 1380, who officiated the church of their apostle St. Bartholomew¹.

This story is not to be treated lightly, even though some of the details are not quite correct, for it has a very ancient tradition to bear it up. St. Eusebius tell us (*Historia ecclesiastica*. I. 13) that he found the story in the archives of Edessa. He omits the relic of the *Sacred Countenance* and the instrumentality of St. Thomas in the composition of the letter. But this holy picture is mentioned by St. John Damascene and many other authors and in the second Council of Nice against the Iconoclasts.

1. From "Vita dell' Abate Mechitar" by F. Minas Nurikhan. Chap. XII.

Closely connected with this letter is the tradition of St. Bartholomew and Thaddeus converting Armenia (see Chap II). Certainly the Apostles and and the seventy-two disciples scattered to the four winds and it would be strange if none of them went in the direction of Edessa and Armenia. Prejudices or *a priori* reasons against the tradition mean nothing. It is defended by St. Jerome (M. P. L. XXVI. 61.) and by Ven. Bede (ibid. XCII. 943), and also by St. Ephrem the Syrian, Evagrius and others. On the transferences of the *Sacred Countenance* see Ciamcian, *History of the Armenians*, and Agostino de Nicolai, Barnabite, *Cenni Storici intorno al S. Sudario*. Genoa. Stamperia Arcivescovile. 1888. on the occasion of the 5th centenary.

APPENDIX IV.

A few things in the Armenian rite and hierarchy seem strange to us Westerns and require explanation. The Armenian Liturgy (or Mass) is quite different from our own both in ritual and language (though often said that throughout the whole world the it is Latin language and mass is the only one in use). The language used is classic Armenian—no longer spoken unless by the Armenians resident in Calcutta. The liturgy has the same principal parts as ours, — Epistle, Gospel, Creed, Pater Noster, Offertory, Consecration, Communion and Last Gospel of St. John, but differs in a multiplicity of details — vestments, prayers, hymns and ceremonies. It would be out of place to go more into details here. It is all described in a most interesting way in Fortescue (op. cit. pp 432–445). The liturgy has been translated

into Latin by Prince Maximilian of Saxony, into Italian by Fr. Avedichian (Mechitarist) and into English by (amongst others) Fr. Issaverdenz, Mechitarist of Venice. It is a most solemn function and its celebration in the Armenian College, Rome, (where, however, for various reasons is wanting much of the splendour attached to it when it is properly carried out) ranks high among the grand ceremonies of the Eternal City.

The Armenian hierarchy is the most similar to ours of all the Oriental ones. There is now the tonsure and the four minor and three major orders. Formally, as in the Greek Church to-day, the subdiaconate was a minor order. Major orders bring with them celibacy, but if one has already a wife before receiving sacred orders, one may retain her and cohabit with her. This is common to all the Oriental Churches, however singular it may appear to us Westerns, who for centuries have adopted the opposite custom. In a Plenary Council of the Armenians held in 1869 it was desired that the priests conform to the Latin regulation of celibacy. The *Catholic Encyclopaedia* is wrong in asserting that this resolution was actually passed, for Catholic married men among the Armenians even to-day become priests and retain their wives.

Another feature of the Armenian hierarchy is the unique position of the person known as the *vardapiet*. The word means *teacher*. He was the only one under a bishop who was entitled to preach. He did not receive a special consecration or ordination, for his was no distinct order; but he was a priest who was made pass an examination in sacred sciences, and, if successful, was by a special ceremony raised to the above-mentioned dignity, given a pastoral staff and delegated to preach and teach. We have

something similar in the conferring of the Doctorate of Theology on our priests. Vardapiets were naturally chosen, by reason of their evident capabilities, for the higher offices of bishop, etc, and even while vardapiets were sometimes given a quasi-episcopal authority over a district. Nowadays any priest may preach and at times is appointed vardapiet as a matter of form, without any ceremony or special examination, provided he be ordinarily fit and unmarried.

The head of the hierarchy is the Patriarch (or Catholicos). The great historical patriarchates of Etchmiadzin, Cis and Agathmar are at present held by schismatics. A new Armenian-Catholic Patriarchate of Cilicia was instituted by Pope Benedict XIV in 1740 (as we saw on page 295). The Patriarch lives at Constantinople. He received official recognition from the Turk in 1830. To the Turk every religion is national and all those of one creed form a nation or *millet*. In this way one might excuse their zeal, provided they were of good faith, in persecuting those Catholic Armenians who were accused of not going to their national (schismatical) church. Each nation then, or religion in the Turkish Empire must have a civil head who is acknowledged by the Sultan when he receives his *Berat* or official recognition. The spiritual rights of the Catholic Patriarch are trifling, beyond those of any Primate and in almost everything he is ruled by the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide.

APPENDIX V.

We have sometimes heard Abbot Mechitar speak of the Armenian Fathers and their works. I do not know of any English author who treats of them, so let me give a hurried account of them and their writings and show where their hidden merit lies.

A "Father" of the Church is not necessarily a Pope, or Bishop or even a priest. The great St. Ephrem the Syrian was but a deacon. But a certain antiquity is required (until St. Bernard in the West and St. John Damascene in the East), sanctity of life and general approbation by the Church. The reason of these conditions is explained in manuals of Theology, and is sufficiently clear in itself.

The first Armenian writer who merited this title was St. Gregory the Illuminator in the IVth century, who complete by renovated Armenian Christianity and was the first of a long series of patriarchs. (Why does Fortescue deny this latter fact, *op. cit.* p. 400. n 2?) His literary merit lies in his composition of parts of the Armenian Breviary and in a host of sermons on various subjects.

Next comes St. Isaac the Parthian. He became patriarch in the year 399. He was the first to translate the Bible into Armenian. With the help of his disciples he put in order the Breviary, the Hymnary, the Ritual, the Calendar and the Sacred Liturgy. He published also a book of Canons, gathered principally from the Councils approved by the Church and from the earliest Fathers. He was greatly esteemed and honoured on account of his dignity and learning by the Emperor Theodosius the younger.

The Council of Ephesus was held while he was in power. He sent his disciples to take part in it and he promulgated its Canons in a national Synod. He was imprisoned and humiliated by the Persians but was liberated before his death in 440.

St. Isaac's coadjutor and successor as lieutenant was St. Mesrob, a man of extraordinary sanctity, gifted with the charisma of working numerous and striking miracles and whose voice struck terror into the hearts of pagans and heretics. He is the author of the Penitential Hymns sung in the Armenian Ritual on week-days in Lent until the eve of Palm Sunday. But his immortal work was the formation of the Armenian, Iberian and (Oriental) Albanian alphabets. He is said to have adapted the first from the Greek, though, if we except three letters, it is impossible to see the resemblance. An example of Armenian writing is given above on p. 37.

One must stop for a moment to say something about the disciples of St. Isaac taken collectively, for it is impossible to speak of them all singly. They were a credit to their master. They completed the Armenian translation of the Holy Scriptures set on foot by him and it defies all criticism. They translated into Armenian also almost all the writings of the preceding Fathers, as well as numerous ecclesiastical and profane histories, and in their abnormal activity displayed an elegance of style and precision of expression beyond all praise.

One of them was John Mantaguni who became catholicos in 475. He was celebrated for his philosophical studies. He is the author of many touching prayers now to be found in the Breviary, and of some mystic treatises which are full of sublime maxims and breathe a sweet unction of affectionate piety.

Another was the eminent St. Moses of Choren, nephew of St. Mesrob. For his acquaintance with divers languages he was called the *Grammarian*. He composed a great number of hymns of remarkable sweetness and some homilies for Sundays and feast-days. But his great work was his History of the Armenian Nation from the days of Adam to his own time. He is thus the father of Armenian history.

Amongst these ancient writers one must at least mention the names of Blessed Eliseus and David the *Invincible Philosopher* as being worthy co-operators in the composition of the Armenian official sacred books.

Political troubles and grave defeats in war had their echo in the want of literary men in Armenia for many centuries of strife, though some active and zealous soul was always to be found. (cf. Av-edichian, "Sulle correzioni fatte ai libri ecclesiastici armeni", pp. 13-17, Venice 1868).

Two later writers must be touched on to close the series, St. Narses of Clac and St. Narses of Lambron. The former ascended the patriarchal throne in 1166. His name is mentioned by Armenians with great reverence. He was a born poet. He wrote a compendium of the whole of the Scriptures in verse. He wrote a homily on the celestial hierarchy and a compendium of the first five chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel. He composed sacred hymns and canticles without parallel in the harmonious flow of the words and the mystic sublimity of thought. Hence he was surnamed the Gracious. But his most important writings from a theological point of view are his numerous letters, particularly those addressed to the emperor Emmanuel Commenus where he explains the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Armenians' explanation of it.

Contemporaneously with him there was his namesake, St. Narses of Lambron, concerning whom the Theatine, Fr. Clement Galano, says, "*Cujus egregia virtus plane digna est ut aeterna laude illustretur nomenque ad ultimas terrarum partes immortalis fama pervehatur*". He was the fruit of his parents' prayers, was a child of striking beauty and the divine grace which adorned him shone in his handsome features. He was urged to become a courtier in the imperial palace but chose instead the monastic life and by reason of his premature wisdom and sanctity was ordained priest at the tender age of sixteen years. He wrote erudite commentaries on the Divine Office and the Liturgy, interpretations of the Psalms, the Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Book of Wisdom and twelve Minor Prophets, homilies on the principal festivals of the year. He composed the "Lives of the Fathers", a compilation of their biographies, works and maxims. He translated, too, a great number of works of non-Armenian Fathers, chief among which rank the writings of St. Gregory the Great and the Rule of St. Benedict. His chief work is a discourse pronounced at Tarsus on the occasion of a reconciliation of the Greeks with the Armenians. It is a perfect masterpiece. He specially chose his words and phrases, arranged them in a well worked-out artifice and delivered the oration with so perfect a delivery that his eloquence on the occasion was acknowledged by his hearers to be the equal of that of Demosthenes.

APPENDIX VI.

No Catholic writer, who is not an Armenian, has ever defended the Armenian Church from the accusation of monophysism. It is constantly repeated that it turned monophysite after the Council of Chalcedon and that the schismatical portion has always remained so. Notwithstanding the number of historians who maintain this, I propose to defend the opposite contention. The subject would require a long treatment on account of the numerous arguments pro et con, but as this is impossible in a short Appendix, I must be brief.

Let us see first the exact question under discussion. It is revealed that Christ was really God and really man, having all the plenitude of the deity and all the properties common to ordinary man. However there were not in Him two distinct and independent individuals. These truths have now for centuries been expressed by the following definite statement, "In Christ there were two distinct and complete *natures*, the divine and the human, but united in one *person*, and that divine". This we know from our catechism. The theological and scientific exposition of the dogma may be sought for in scholastic manuals. The divinity of Christ was defined in the first Oecumenical Council of Nice in 325 against Arius. The unity of *person* was defined in the third, held at Ephesus in 431 against Nestorius, and the true manhood of Christ was defined in the fourth, held at Chalcedon in 451 against Eutyches. Our attent-

ion is confined almost entirely to this last-mentioned council. The heresy it condemned is known as monophysism, because it proclaimed only one nature or essence in Christ, which was a mixture of the divine and human. Its supporters were thus called monophysites. I am contending that the Armenian Church was not and is not to be numbered with these.

The case against it has been put very strongly and blackly by Fortescue (op. cit.) who on no less than twenty-seven distinct pages scattered throughout a book which treats of all the oriental schismatics except the "orthodox", mentions this detail of Armenian theology and ecclesiastical history. He expounds his theory so well and so fully that to confute him is to confute all others who side with him.

To begin with, no Armenian was present at the Council of Chalcedon. Fortescue quotes Tournebize, *Histoire politique et religieuse de l'Arménie*, p. 87, as saying that ten Armenian bishops were there. Tournebize refers the reader to Ciamcian, *History of Armenia* (in Armenian) vol. II, p. 133, but I can find no trace of it. What is more, the author refutes the Greek historian Theopistes for saying that two of St. Mesrob's disciples were there, explicitly mentions that the country was wholly taken up at the time with a terrible war with the Persians and the people were in such undescribable anguish that they knew nothing about the Council. We have even a letter of the infamous Photius to Zachary, the Patriarch of the Armenians, in which this is asserted and is not contradicted. Besides it is the continual tradition of the Armenians.

It is easy then to see how, considering the difficulties of communication in those days, the Armenians could not be well informed about what took place at Chalcedon. As a matter of fact they

were deceived by Syrian monophysites as to what was enacted there. These said that the synod, in asserting two distinct natures, contradicted Ephesus, which insisted on unity of some kind. The Armenians, who embraced the teaching of Ephesus, were thus led to reject Chalcedon. That they were misinformed as to the decisions of this fourth council, is expressly stated in the seventeenth general council, held at Florence, by Pope Eugenius IV, in his epistle on the reunion of the Armenians beginning "*Exsultate Deo*". All this is admitted by Fortescue, but he finds himself in some difficulty as to the explanation of how Armenians preferred the word of foreign Syrians to that of their own bishops who had assisted at the Council. Then he commences to theorize in order to extricate himself. There is no need for all this. Things are as I have represented them.

The rejection of Chalcedon became then a watch-word among Armenians¹ and traces of it remain until this day as saw in Chap. III. This was accentuated by political enmities. Chalcedon was Byzantine; Armenians had no love for anything Byzantine; all the more did they cry out against Chalcedon. One perceives immediately how Fortescue's great argument — the test, as he calls it p. 179 — falls to pieces, for the Armenians rejected Chalcedon because they did not know what it was, and not because they were monophysites. Their faith on this head we shall soon see.

It is of primary importance to note here that one's religious opinions cannot always with certainty be determined from by the words one uses to exprest

1. They anathematise too St. Leo, who was the reigning Pope.

them¹. In the case in point, *nature* and *person* might easily have had different meanings from what they have in scholastic language now. It is a historical fact that the great St. Cyril of Alexandria used of Christ the phrase “*una natura verbi incarnata*”, yet who dares to suggest that this dauntless champion of the faith was a monophysite? Similarly Nestorius said several times that there was but one person in Christ, yet we know that he meant it in a heretical sense. One must not think then that, when an Armenian says there was but one nature in Christ, he is a monophysite. Fortescue concedes (p. 425) that this expression along with the rejection of Chalcedon are the only two obstacles. Well, we have already disposed of the Chalcedon question. The other rectifies itself, for in Armenian there was but one word for nature and person, *pnutiun*. Fortescue admits that²; he therefore gives himself up hands bound³.

The ground having been thus cleared up, let us see positively what Armenians did believe and do yet believe. Fortescue begins one of his paragraphs (p. 411) thus, “The Church of Armenia in the 6th century turned Monophysite. There is not the slightest doubt on this subject; the “Gregorian” Church is still Monophysite”. With all due respect I beg to deny flatly these sweeping statements. It has already been observed in this work how there was not throughout the ages a division between the Uniate and schismatic Armenian Churches, as we

1. cf. Fortescue, p. 67.

2. p. 412.

3. Armenians have now a definite scholastic vocabulary. Nature is rendered *pnutiun*, person *anze*, essence *euthiun*, and substance *koiuthiun*.

have had for the last century, but the pastors and their flock followed their own whim in the matter and so Uniates and schismatics often attended the same church. Hence the Liturgy, etc. was always one. Well, the Liturgy, the Hymnary, the Profession of faith, the Breviary, the Ordinal, whose antiquity and authenticity we briefly touched on in Appendix V, contain explicit declarations of the two natures in Christ, as I have verified myself. It is impossible to quote them all. Let the following quotation suffice. It taken from the Armenian version of the Nicene Creed as it is (and has been for centuries) recited by both Uniates and "Gregorian Armenians of to-day:" "I believe..... in Jesus Christ..... Who took flesh, became man and was born perfectly of Mary, the Holy Virgin, Who took a body and spirit and mind and all things man has, in very truth and not in appearance only". Again, after the Consecration, is said, "After He (Christ), in a union without mixture became incarnate of the mother of God," etc.

If one reads the Armenian Fathers (and it is they who form the church, not an occasional schismatic) one finds the same story. In their writings the Catholic doctrine is so clearly expressed that only by sheer ignorance of the writings of these holy and learned men could their Church be called heretical. Let one of them speak for all. St. Narses of Clac in his letters to the Emperor Emmanuel Comnenus writes, "From two perfect natures, divine and human, was made a perfect hypostasis, inalterable remaining the divine nature, unaltered the human..... Both the assumer and the assumed..... were united in an unconfused union above all understanding". He also accepts explicitly all St. Cyril of Alexandria said on the point and then *the Saint*

declares on oath that this has been the faith professed by the Armenian Church from its origin. With what great truth then could Pope Gregory XIII write that Bull to which I drew the attention of the reader¹, and how false and hypocritical it would be, had the Armenians been as Fortescue depicts them!

Again, the good monks of San Lazzaro, Venice, where this work was printed, have compiled the series of Armenian catholicoi who throughout all the centuries ruled the Armenian Church. They have shown that by far the greater number were united to the See of Rome. A fortiori they were not tainted with heresy, which is incompatible with Catholicity. As regards the rest, who were schismatics, it does not much matter, for they were the exception. But even their orthodoxy on this question is assured from the fact that they used the same ecclesiastical books as the Uniates. We have even positive evidence for the faith of the schismatics. Out of many I choose a letter of a certain Paul of Taron in the 11th century, who writes, "The divine nature was not changed into the human nor the human into the divine, but each remained unimpaired".

Finally, I have before me, as I write, an official schismatical catechism² of the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, where the Catholic doctrine is put so clearly that one would think it was from the Holy Father himself. "(Christ) had but one person, and that divine, and the two natures, indivisible and unconfused, are united in one divine person, the properties of the two natures remaining intact".

1. See above p. 263.

2. Fortescue (p. 260) argues from such a source.

There remain to be solved some objections taken from history, but I shall leave them to some future occasion. They have no foundation in fact. I shall mention two because they are of great importance. In a Synod at Tovin in the year 554(?) under the Patriarch Narses the members got alarmed at the terrible progress of the error(?) of two natures in Christ. Among the decrees which come forth from this council there were two important ones: 1st to add to the Trisagion these words "who was crucified for us" 2nd to commence a new era from the date of this great and solemn declaration of Monophysism.

The Trisagion, sung in Latin churches on Good Friday, is an invocation of the "Holy God, Holy Strong One, Holy Immortal One". Of course, if the Armenians intended to address the whole Trinity they would be saying God, as God, suffered and not man. But they refer this prayer to God the Son only, and so there is no difficulty. Besides this addition was in use before this Synod was held (cf. Avedichian, *Sulle correzioni dei libri Armeni*. Venice). There are indeed two many uncertainties about this Synod (cf. Fortescue. op. cit. p. 413. n. 1.2) to enable us to conclude anything definite.

The other assertion is a huge falsehood. The number of years (1460) composing the cycle of Haik, the father of Armenians, were completed again when the synod was being held. It was found that the civil calendar did not coincide. It was therefore agreed, for this reason and not for any other, to commence an Armenian era that year and reform the calendar. The Armenian era is computed 551 years after Christ.

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Rome, 17th January, 1916.

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